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THE LOVE OF LANDRY

THE LOVE *of* LANDRY

By PAUL LAURENCE DUNBAR



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To my Friend

MAJOR WILLIAM COOKE DANIELS

IN MEMORY OF SOME PLEASANT DAYS
SPENT OVER THIS LITTLE STORY

The Love of Landry

CHAPTER FIRST

FOR a time, at least, the Osborne family circle was to be broken up. There were only three of them in the big old house in Gramercy Park: John Osborne, the father, and Helen and Mildred, the daughters. The mother had died when Mildred was less than ten, and since then the three had never been separated for long at a time. Even when they were away for the summer, the father managed to join them every week or two if they were near New York, or, if far away, to spend several weeks with them at the end of the season. But now Mildred, who was a slight

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girl, had contracted a cough, and the doctor had ordered her away from New York.

“There is, at present, nothing the matter with her lungs,” said old Dr. Van Pelt. “Nothing, except a tendency. But a tendency, my dear sir, is a thing that should always be stopped. By all means, always stop a tendency.”

“But, Heavens, doctor!” exclaimed Osborne, “where shall I send the child?”

He was usually a very placid old gentleman until something came near one of his doves. Then he was apt to become nervous, and lose his repose.

“Oh, there’s the south of France, southern California, Colorado, — oh, a dozen places; but for my part,” he added, shaking his *pince-nez* thought-

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fully, "I should go to Colorado. High, dry air, out-of-door life, and in a year, or maybe two, our young lady comes back, blooming and hearty."

"But, Van Pelt, man, Colorado? why, that seems almost beyond civilisation!"

"It is n't, but what matter if it were? You know I'm a doctor of the old school, although I've kept up with the new; and it's one of my old-fogy opinions, sort of left over, as it were, that civilisation has always been a foe to good health. When our ancestors painted themselves, and danced impossible things on the sand, who ever heard of weak lungs? But now, after a season of tripping it in a close room in heavy silks, my lady has a cough. But it's no matter, John, it's no matter, it's

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a slight thing. Pack up the little girl nevertheless, and take her away. Good-morning. Good-morning."

So it was decided that to Colorado Mildred must go. But then the quandary confronted the family, who would go with her? There were many reasons why Helen could not leave, and the father thought of his business. At this juncture they did as they always did, and called in council Aunt Annesley. She was the sister of John Osborne's deceased wife, a widow of fortune, and possessed of very positive views. She came, and the case was laid before her.

"Hum," she mused, "to Colorado. Why not to southern France?"

"The doctor prefers the former place."

"He's an old foggy, and I don't see why you have him, John."

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"I beg your pardon, Anna, but he's both an old friend and an excellent physician."

"Oh, I mean no harm to your Van Pelt. He comes of a very excellent old family, and I have no doubt does very well for his age. The question is merely, do you insist upon Colorado?"

"We do."

"Then the matter simply settles itself without further discussion. John, you must go with Mildred."

"But, Anna —"

"You have worked long enough and hard enough to take a year's vacation. The business for that length of time can do without your personal supervision. Now don't interrupt me. You know that Mildred must have some one of her near and dear ones with her. Now, Helen

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can't go, while Mr. Berkeley — that is, while matters are, as at present, *in statu quo*."

Helen went furiously red, while Mildred laughed behind her hand.

"I would go myself," went on Mrs. Annesley, "if things were otherwise. In fact, I should n't mind a trip to France; but Colorado — way out there? — never!"

And so, because there was no gain-saying Mrs. Annesley's word, this much was settled, that John Osborne should accompany his younger daughter out West, while Mrs. Annesley should take charge of Helen and their home.

"And I do hope, my dear," Mrs. Annesley added before going, "that you'll take good care of yourself out there among those cowboys and catamounts and things. It really

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seems terrible to send you to such a place."

"Why, Aunt Anna, I'm going to wear leggings, and go deer-hunting," laughed Mildred; "and I shall come back wearing a sombrero and a buckskin skirt."

"Don't joke, Mildred, don't joke. It's highly improper, and I'm sure you are joking, for you could never so disgrace your family as to wear leggings and a buckskin skirt."

"Dear Aunt Anna has such an overpowering sense of humour," said Mildred, as the door closed upon their worthy relative.

"You really should n't laugh at her, Mildred," returned Helen; "you know she has such a good heart, and it was so good of her to offer to come here and take charge of the house."

"I'd rather it were you than I,

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though," replied the younger girl. "I'd sooner take my chances with catamounts and cowboys."

More than either her father or sister, Mildred Osborne retained her good spirits in face of the coming separation. She was young, she had only turned twenty, and she had youth's belief in her powers of recuperation. Not for one moment did she doubt what would be the outcome to her health. She saw that the western trip was the inevitable, and, like a little philosopher, accepted it.

It was the night before the day of their departure that she stood in the drawing-room, looking out on the dreary September streets. It was early in the month, but a cold rain blew gustily against the pane. Every now and then a bouncing hansom went by, its lamps throwing a silvery

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glow on the wet streets. A moment before, Mildred had been crying, as she and Helen talked over the morrow's parting. But now her cheery mood had re-asserted itself, and she was drumming on the glass, and humming a merry tune to herself. Suddenly she ceased, and pressed her face against the pane with a convulsive motion. "Look there!" she cried, "at that poor child, trudging along with a bundle through this miserably cold rain."

Helen came to the window. "Too bad," she said calmly.

"Oh, why will people send their children out such nights as this?"

"Because they're poor, and have to, I suppose."

"And we're warm and comfortable here in the house, while that poor child is out there stumbling through

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the rain. Look, she almost fell. I'm going out to her."

"Mildred, you must not; you're not well, and you'll take your death of cold."

"Oh, Helen, don't stop me. I must and I will. It isn't right. I've never thought about it at all until to-night."

As she talked, the girl was hastily throwing a cloak about her shoulders. Against her sister's continued remonstrances, she hurried out into the street, and after the child. The little trudger with the great bundle had gotten some distance beyond the house when Mildred went to find her, and Helen, shivering in the doorway, saw her when she overtook, and stooped to speak to, the midget, and then watched her lift the child's bundle and turn back toward the house.

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“Impulsive girl,” she said to herself, starting down the steps; but just then she saw a hansom, which was about passing, stop, and a gentleman get out. He took possession of the bundle, placing his umbrella at the disposal of the two. Helen gasped, “Arthur Heathcote! — what will he think?”

It did n't seem to matter much what Arthur Heathcote thought, for it was a very merry party that came up the steps of the Osborne house. Mildred was squeezing the hand of the mite, and laughing, and the young Englishman, looking decidedly awkward with his bundle, smiling down upon them both. Mediæval bravery very commonly risked death for a woman's love, but it remained for nineteenth-century courage to risk ridicule.

“Surely, you're not going to bring

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her in here? How do you do, Mr. Heathcote?"

"Why not?" this from Mildred.

"Oh, why, she's so draggly. Just drop the bundle right here, Mr. Heathcote."

"The more reason for bringing her in. Come on, little girl."

The Osborne house was old-fashioned enough to have in its drawing-room the grate of an earlier period. Of course, in winter, there was furnace heat, and no one shivered about the inadequate open fire as they had done at functions of fifty years before. But then, it looked cheerful, and it showed up the mellow tints of some famous pictures, a Maclise and a Corot among them; and so, when the nights were chill, the fire was duly lit. Before it to-night the little girl was placed, and the wet shawl taken from

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her head and put out to dry. Nina, the maid, held the garment gingerly between her thumb and forefinger, and sniffed perceptibly, but Mildred beamed on the child, as she sat blinking her round black eyes at the blaze. With her own hands she brought her hot tea, and good things to eat, and the child, half-dazed and wondering, looked up into the girl's face, and took them all in silence, save when they could draw from her lips the reluctant answer to some question.

"I wonder if she's real clean?" asked Helen, timorously approaching.

"Cleanliness in children is abnormal, and should be discouraged," said Mildred, shortly.

"Oh! ha, ha, ha! good, good!" cried Heathcote; "cleanliness abnormal, good! but of course, Miss Mildred, you don't mean it?"

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At this juncture the visitor, feeling her dignity offended, made a motion to go. Mildred hastened to wrap her up warmly and to slip something shiny in her hand. The little hard fingers closed around the soft ones, and Mr. Osborne's young daughter received a look from the child's grave eyes that brought the tears into her own, and made her stoop and kiss the grimy face. When she looked up again, Heathcote was standing at the door, hat in hand, and water-proof on.

"I'm going to send the little one home, you know," he explained.

"Oh —" began Helen.

"But it is good of you," said Mildred, softly, and he bowed himself out, helping the child down the steps as if she had been a princess.

"Mildred, how could you?" cried Helen, almost tearfully.

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“I could n’t if he had n’t helped me, dear. He did n’t do it because I made him, but because it was in him. Helen, I have a slight cough, and every one is helping and sheltering me. Father is leaving his business to go there across the country with me. That poor little thing, did n’t you hear her cough? And yet she is out in the rain alone, and carrying her great burden; could n’t I do that little bit for her?”

“What a queer girl you are, Mildred!”

And then Heathcote came back. His face was glowing with exercise, and no man ever looked less disgraced.

“I put her in a cab, you know, and told the cabby where to go,” he said; “some beastly little street down here. Really, you ought to have seen the

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little beggar; she looked as pleased as a kitten, and hugged her bundle up as tight —” and there was a light in his eyes as he looked down upon Mildred, such as they put in the halo of a saint. “Was n’t it jolly?” he added.

“Jolly? yes,” said Mildred, with just the suspicion of a shake in her voice; and then they talked of other things, of commonplaces, until Helen, according to that ancient, and not always respected custom, rose and excused herself.

There was a long silence between them when they were alone. The big Englishman, fair, with the suggestion that the blood was always just ready to come swift to his face, was good to look at, and the girl, with the color in her cheeks, and her thick, brown hair half high

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upon her head, was a fitting foil for him.

"So you are going to-morrow, Miss Mildred?" he said.

"Yes, to-morrow; but you know to-morrow is the day that never comes."

"I have believed that fallacy until now," he said, "but now I find that it does come, and crushingly soon."

"Yes, I go to-morrow," she added aimlessly; "it's going to be a long journey, is n't it?"

"I wish I might take it for you."

"You are good; you have been so good to me to-night, and I thank you."

"Please don't thank me. I wish I might go on being good to you for a thousand years, even if I had no other reward than hope. Miss Mil-

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dred, I don't want to go on boring you, but you know, you know, don't you? "

"I know, of course I do, Arthur, dear Arthur; but can't you understand? It's so hard for me to explain it to-night."

"I'm a brute for making you think of it, instead of trying to make this last night of yours at home pleasant. What a miserable blunderer and brute I am!"

"No, no, it is I who am the brute, who cannot feel — I — "

"I wish Heaven would send me the man who would say so. You can feel, you do feel, only I am not the man. Well, let me see; this is the fifth 'no' I have heard from you since April. Very well, no 'no' that you say shall be final until some other claims you. And now, I must not

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keep you up. I shall not see you to-morrow."

His tone was cheery, but his face was pale, though the light that was in his eyes when he looked at her had not died out as he left her. She sank down, crying softly, "He is so good, so honest, why cannot I love him?"

CHAPTER SECOND

THE rain was over, and the sun, come from his sulking tent, looked bravely on the world again. It was the morning of Mildred's departure. Heathcote had sent flowers, and Mrs. Annesley had already come and begun her matronly duties over John Osborne's house. She was very busy indeed, much more busy than circumstances at all demanded. But she felt that nervous bustle would anyway show the importance of the position she held.

"It's really awful, John, for me to have to leave my dear home and come here, but I knew under just what an affliction you and the dear girls were

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labouring, and so I determined to make the sacrifice. John, do be careful of Mildred; you know how her poor dear mother went off."

She applied her handkerchief tenderly to her eyes, and shook with ostensible sobs. She had helped worry her sister to death.

"It was very good of you to come here, Anna," said Mr. Osborne, "and I know how you will miss the comforts of your own home." His house was twice as large and a good deal more home-like.

"Of course, you know, John, it's been a dear house to me ever since Annesley died, and you know how attached I am to it, and how hard it is for me to leave it."

When she wasn't at Lenox or at Newport, she was abroad.

"I know all, Anna, I know all,

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and your kindness shall never be forgotten."

"Oh, well, for myself, I shall be all fears and anxiety for the dear child. But of course, on Helen's account, it wouldn't do to let my feelings get the better of me, and so I had thought that perhaps this winter, not too soon, you know, but if we have good news of our dear Mildred, my grief might make the concession of a few receptions and a ball or two."

"That 's right, that 's right."

"And it 's such a magnificent house for entertaining. That ball-room would accommodate an army."

"Have your army, Anna, and draw on me for supplies."

"Oh, you dear, generous John. What times we shall have, and it 's all so necessary for Helen, while Mr.

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Berkeley, — that is, while matters are, as I said before, *in statu quo*."

"Give Helen any pleasures she wants to keep her spirits up, — balls, parties, dances, the theatre."

"Glorious! I'll do it. Oh, could her poor mother have lived to see this day! And, oh, John, do be careful of Mildred among those people out there, and don't let her put on leggings and a buckskin skirt."

John Osborne started away. He could stand it no longer, and a short time later he was locked securely in his library, to spend the hour before train time.

After leaving him, Mrs. Annesley traversed the whole servants' department, awing them into respect for her authority. Then, with a muttered "Now I must go and comfort the girls," she started for her niece's

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room. But the rustle of her silken skirts upstairs was a herald that preceded her, and just before she reached the top, a door banged to. She kept her way, however, right on to Helen's room. It was deserted. Then she went to Mildred's room, and looked at the grim panels shut against her.

"Poor child," she said, "I know that she hates so to leave me that the sight of my face would be only a grief to her. I won't go in;" and Mrs. Annesley went down into the drawing-room to spend the rest of the time alone.

The girls were together in Mildred's room. They had gone there because Helen would not have dared to lock her door upon her aunt. They were in the close intimate converse of girls about to part, and the

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elder sister was shedding real tears, as she chided the younger for her apparent heartlessness.

"I don't believe you care for me a bit, Mildred, or you surely would show more feeling than you do at leaving me."

"Dearie," said Mildred, "what's the use of my crying, and reddening my eyes, when I know it will be such a short time until we're laughing at the whole thing and at all the funny things we've seen?"

"But, oh, suppose you don't come back?"

"But I am coming back. Now, Nell, don't be a silly goose; did I ever say I was going to do a thing that I didn't do?"

Mildred was bearing up bravely, poor little girl, though there were dark rings about her eyes, and she

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had to keep swallowing. Fortunately a new matter of interest took hold of her sister's mind, and she asked suddenly, "Arthur Heathcote, did he propose again?"

Instantly Mildred's whole attitude changed. She became at once defiant, and yet with something of sorrow in her manner. The defiance was external, the sorrow personal.

"Yes," she said.

"And you?"

"I gave him the same answer, the only one I can ever give him."

"Oh, Mildred —"

"Please don't let's talk of it, Helen, he's such a good fellow."

"And such a chance."

"I'm looking for love, not chance. Arthur Heathcote demands love, and I cannot give it to him. Such men as Mr. Berkeley make a chance. Oh,

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forgive me, Helen, you know I did n't mean it," she cried, as Helen had recourse to her rather inadequate handkerchief again. "I didn't mean what I said; I don't know what I'm saying. Arthur Heathcote is so good I came near to surrendering last night. But I know I couldn't give him what he wants, what he deserves, and I wouldn't give him less."

"You can try."

"No," said the girl, dreamily, "there is something else for me. I have known it ever since men talked to me of love. Some one, some prince, maybe," she added, laughing, "will come to claim me, and I have known just how I shall feel when he takes me by the hand."

So many women believe this. It is true of so few.

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"That all comes of reading your silly stories, Mildred."

"Oh, no, you goose," and Mildred threw her arms about her sister's neck, "it all comes of reading my silly heart."

"And suppose Prince Charming does not appear?"

"Then I shall marry Arthur, if he is still unwed."

"But what silly talk this is for us, within an hour of parting."

"Helen," said Mildred, gravely, "this is just the kind of talking I want to do, and if you touch that handkerchief again, I'll strangle you with smelling-salts."

The morning was bringing out its most vivid contrast to the night's dreariness as they rolled away to the station. Helen was subdued, but Mildred chattered like a mag-

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pie, and her aunt kept pace with her.

"Remember all my warnings," said the latter, as they neared their destination.

"Yes, auntie, dear, I'm to flirt with the cowboys, if they're not a thing of the past, and I suppose they are, in this degenerate age of the world, when everything romantic is past."

"Mildred, don't lay any such thing at my door. I said nothing of the kind."

"And I'm to bring you a little papoose to raise."

"John, listen to the girl. A papoose! why, I wouldn't have such a thing."

"Never mind, Aunt Anna, you're right. A papoose would be troublesome. I'll bring you a great big Indian."

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Mrs. Annesley collapsed just as they reached the Grand Central Station. She revived as the carriage drew up, and they found Arthur Heathcote there to help them out.

The others went on up to the train, but he held Mildred back a pace.

"I could n't help coming," he said; "you know I did n't intend to. But—but you'll forgive me, won't you?"

"Kindness is always easy to forgive; and, oh! thank you for your flowers."

"I am glad if they gave you pleasure, but I should n't have come, should I?"

"Do you feel very guilty?" she asked, playfully.

"I am simply bowed with my transgression, you know."

"I shall not scold you, then, since you are sufficiently contrite."

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"Then I shall always be contrite before you."

"Really, you are like a Methodist, who is always possessed of 'a lowly and a contrite heart.' But then, when a man has no weapon against a woman, he uses his shield of contrition."

"I hope, at least, this time, it has turned aside your anger." They were approaching the others on the platform then. "Where shall you stop?" he asked abruptly.

"Oh, we're going out on a ranch belonging to one of father's friends, or a company he knows, or something like that. It is situated somewhere between Denver and the setting sun."

"Good-bye," he said gently; "I know this must be a family party, and I cannot claim the pleasure of

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admittance. Good-bye; I must speak to your father."

He went over and shook Osborne's hand, and then turned away down the platform, looking back every moment with a wistful expression on his face until he had turned the corner and was out of sight.

And then they went into the luxurious coach, Helen as tearful as Nina, the maid and Mildred all gayety. Mrs. Annesley's handkerchief was in constant use, and John Osborne was very grave. He was taking his child away from her sister, perhaps never to see her again. Then a polite porter said, "All off, please."

Mrs. Annesley kissed her niece quickly on the nose and hurried to the door. But Helen held her sister in one long embrace.

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“ Oh, Mildred ! ” was all she could say.

And “ Oh, Helen ! ” was the choking reply ; and then the younger girl brightened up as her sister left the car, and waved a frantic farewell to her. Then the blue-coated official waved his arms, and the long train pulled out. Mildred was alone in the state-room with her father. As they passed from the sight of those on the platform, she threw herself on his breast, crying, “ Oh, father, father ! ” and burst into tears.

CHAPTER THIRD

MR. OSBORNE had felt a sort of grieved surprise at his daughter's gayety in the face of departure from the ties she should have held sacred. But he was more terribly shocked at her utter breakdown. When he saw that instead of being heartless, she had really been brave for her sister's sake, he felt a helpless resentment at his own stupidity that could wrong her, even in thought. He hastened to try to quiet the girl's sorrow, and when Mildred saw that her tears disturbed her father, she dried her eyes, and smiling like an April day, exclaimed, "Oh, what a baby I am! but it was

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hard, was n't it, papa, leaving Helen, and everything I love? "

"It was hard, and you are a brave little girl, that's what you are, and I'm an old fool not to have seen it."

"You must n't call yourself a fool, papa; it is n't at all respectful, and then, there is n't a shade of reason for it."

"Oh, yes, there is. Do you know—" he began.

But she put her hand over his mouth.

"Yes, I know; you thought I was heartless and unfeeling, because I didn't seem to care about leaving, and that's just what I wanted you to think then. I wanted them all to think it. So I'm not so bad at acting, you see."

Her cheeriness warmed her father's heart, and restored his self-respect.

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He laughed and chatted with his daughter in his old accustomed way, and she responded in such a merry mood that he did not note the tremour in her voice, nor see the cloud that now and then rested on her brow.

“Do you know,” he was saying, “I’m glad I had the chance to come with you, Mildred. I feel already like a new man. I suppose I should have stayed on there, just working, with my little summer jaunts for intermission, until I should have dropped in harness. It’s strange to me how little enjoyment the rich really get out of their wealth. Talk about the slavery of the poor! It’s the rich who are really to be pitied,—those people with enjoyment in their grasp, and yet with golden scales upon their eyes that keep them from

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seeing and grasping their opportunities. I wish Helen could be here."

Just then the porter came in to see if anything was needed. At least that was ostensibly what he came for. In reality, he came because *he* needed or thought he needed something. After he had been dismissed, Mildred asked, "But, papa, don't you think that even the life the wealthy drudge leads is better than the existence dragged out by that poor coloured man who just came in here, trying to smile a little fee out of our pockets?"

"Poor coloured man! Why, Mildred, that man gets more out of life than I do. He has a greater capacity for enjoyment, with the paradox that less satisfies it. You think it humiliates him to take a tip? Not in the least. That's his business. He cour-

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teously fleeces us, and then laughs about it, no doubt. Ha, ha!"

"You're becoming quite a cynic; I'm ashamed of you."

"Well, I guess an old codger who has dropped business and gone racing across the continent with the prettiest little malingerer in the world can afford to be a bit cynical, even contemptuous, in his attitude towards the rest of the world."

Mildred cuddled up close to her father, and so they rattled on.

The train bounded over the rails like a thing of life. It sped over bridges that spanned great rivers, through cities, towns, and hamlets, pausing only at long intervals to take breath, as if weary of its terrific race. Then it stops for a little while at a great city on an inland sea. It is night when they reach there, and

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the shimmer of the water and the lights of the streets make Mildred sad for a space, for her mind goes back to the bay and the rivers at home, and she thinks of Helen alone there, with just the servants and Aunt Annesley. Then the porter comes again, and she goes to bed to bathe the pillow with tears of homesickness and yearning, while her father goes into the smoking-room to brood over his cigar. What a pity it is that women cannot smoke. They would weep less. The puffs that John Osborne took on his cigar that night were the full equivalent of Mildred's tears.

With all the faith one may have in one's self, with all the strong hopefulness of youth, it is yet a terrible thing to be forced away from home, from all one loves, to an unknown,

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uncared-for country, there to fight, hand to hand with death, an uncertain fight. There is none of the rush and clamour of battle that keeps up the soldier's courage. There is no clang of the instruments of war. The panting warrior hears no loud huzzas, and yet the deadly combat goes on; in the still night, when all the world's asleep, in the gray day, in the pale morning, it goes on, and no one knows it save himself and death. Then if he go down, he knows no hero's honors; if he win, he has no special praise. And yet, it is a terrible lone, still fight.

In the morning both Mildred and her father were in their accustomed good spirits. Their minds had adjusted themselves to the changed situation, and Nature, as if rewarding them for their good behaviour,

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smiled upon them. It was a glorious day. Great masses of white clouds were piled high in the heavens like fairy mountains, and between them stretched long rifts of blue like intervening streams. They were passing through a green rolling land, touched not yet with the yellow hand of decay, although it was September. Much of the land was in pasture, and Mildred laughed as she watched the horses gallop wildly away from the fences as the train flew by, or the placid cows regarding the express with undisturbed equanimity.

So the day passed, and they went through another great city on a lake, and then on again, the country becoming flatter and browner as they proceeded. The rolling green land was succeeded by perfect seas of

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yellow corn. Corn here, there, and everywhere. It seemed that all the world had been drowned beneath its moving billows. Look to either side she would, the girl saw nothing but the one grain, stretching for miles along the track and on over to the horizon.

“What — what do they do with so much corn, papa?” she asked.

“They bring down prices with so much corn,” he answered grimly.

“Yes, but what else do they do with it? Surely it has some other use besides that?”

“It has. They eat it, they feed it to their stock, they mill it, and they corner it.”

“I’ve heard of corners in wheat, but — ”

“My dear, there can be a corner in anything that one man has and

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another man wants. A corner is just the repetition of the act of the dog in the manger in the fable, with the exception that the ox is left the alternative of paying a high price to the dog or going without. Well, even an option is a good thing," and the old man chuckled thoughtfully.

"Papa, were you ever in a corner?"

"Which side, the cornerer or the cornered?"

"The cornerer."

Mr. Osborne smiled again, and patted the girl's head.

"Well, now, if this were the Inquisition, and I had to answer that question or go to the rack, I should be in a very unpleasant situation;" and still laughing, he rose and made his way to that refuge of the way-faring man — the smoking-room.

"I wonder if papa ever cornered

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anybody," mused Mildred; but finding no answer to the question in the fields that had made it possible, she turned her mind to other things. It did not take long for the other things to drive all thoughts of corn and corners out of her head, for those other things proved to be prairie-dogs, sitting demurely by their houses with their hands up, like devout little boys in prayer. A sudden peal at the bell, so decided, so hurried, that it brought the porter hastening to Mildred as if she were on fire, and he had to hurry to put her out, evinced her interest.

"What is it, miss?" asked the startled servant.

"Tell my father to come here quickly."

"Can I help you?" he was sure something was the matter.

"No, no; just hurry, that 's all."

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If that porter had been a blackbird instead of a black man, he would have flown, so great was his excitement. As it was, he came as near accomplishing that impossible feat as Nature, a narrow aisle, and a rolling car would allow him. He had to go the length of another car before he found Mr. Osborne, but he seemed to achieve the distance in an incredibly short time. Then he came, guiding back the old gentleman, who was white to the lips.

Mildred stood up as he approached.

"What is it?" he asked in an anxious tone.

"Didn't you see them?" and just then they passed another dog-town, and she cried, "There they are! There they are! Oh, papa, look at them!"

Mr. Osborne saw what the excite-

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ment was about and collapsed limply into his seat.

"Mildred, Mildred," he said, "is this what you have called me for? Where, oh, where, is your reserve, the fruit of a hundred drawing-rooms? What would your Aunt Anna say?" and he bent into a very undignified curve.

"I don't care," Mildred pouted; "they are just as cute as they can be."

"Why, you nearly startled that porter out of his wits. He didn't say it, but he looked as if he thought you might be in a fit."

And, indeed, the coloured man was still staring at them with wide, white eyes, and when he saw them burst anew into laughter, he left the door and went back to his place, in disgust no doubt with the thought in

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his mind that here was another instance of white people trampling on, and making a fool of, the black man.

"I did n't mean to frighten him," said Mildred. "But it was such a new sight to me! I'll give him an extra tip before we leave."

"You should make him pay you for turning him so near white, even for such a short space of time."

"I don't know anything I've enjoyed half so much as those dear little dogs. They are such plump, roly-poly little things. Do you know, papa, they remind me of little Chinese babies?"

"Have mercy on the dogs, Mildred, do."

"I love them."

"That proves you a tenderfoot. I don't believe they are held in such reverence by the people of the West,

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especially those whose business takes them riding over the prairie."

They were nearing Denver, and it was afternoon.

"There's our first glimpse of Pike's Peak," said Osborne.

"Where? Oh, yes. But look, papa, here's another dog-town."

It was dusk when they rolled into Denver, where they were to stop for a day.

"This is Denver, Denver, and I am West," she said breathlessly.

"You are West, yes, you are West, little girl."

As they alighted at the hotel door, she looked round her once more at the busy streets, the hurrying people, and murmured as if in a dream, "Denver."

Yes, Denver, the city where so many hopes were blighted, where

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so many dreams came true, where so many fortunes went up and so many lives went down. Denver, over which Nature broods with mystic calm, and through which humanity struggles with hot, strenuous life.

CHAPTER FOURTH

THE ranch to which they were destined lay about one hundred miles south and west of Denver, and after a day's rest they set out therefor. The train took them within eight miles of the place, and at the station they were to take wagon to the end of their journey.

Mildred declared herself better already. The sights were all so new to her,—the rolling, illimitable plains, then the great bleak mountains, standing up like hoary sentinels guarding the land.

“It's magnificent!” she breathed; “this is geography realised! The Rockies!”

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“Wait until you get to going over those roads in a wagon-team, though.”

“Don’t pour cold water now, papa; let me go on enjoying when I may, so that I shall have something to remember when I may not.”

“Go on, child, and store up numerous memories, for you’ll need them,” said her father, banteringly.

Every turn of the train disclosed new beauties to the girl’s wondering eyes. Before her lay the panorama of mountain and cloud. Time and time again she found herself puzzled to tell which was vapour and which was rock. First, the brown foothills shrouded in a purple haze, and behind them, range after range rising in snow-garmented grandeur.

When they arrived at the station, a young man came forward to meet them. His dress was in no way re-

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markable,—not at all in the extravagant style which the illustrators of fiction had made familiar to Mildred's eyes, and she had time to notice that he had a pleasing face, although it was much browned, and a good gray eye, before he said,—

“This is Mr. Osborne?”

“That's my name, sir. I suppose you are Hendrickson?”

“No, Mr. Hendrickson was unable to come, and so sent me in his place. Our buck-board is just here at the end of the platform.”

“Unable to come,” mused Mildred, mentally. “Hum, that is not dialect, and here's Aunt Annesley's cowboy at last. I wonder where his pistols are.”

She laughed to herself as she thought of her aunt looking askance at the young man who was with

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them. She turned to look at him, and his eyes were fastened on her face.

"Impertinence," thought Mildred; he'd better attend to his own business. I am right, though; he has got good eyes, such a soft gray."

"Here we are," said the young man quickly, as they approached the vehicle, a large, easy, two-seated affair, to which two wiry horses were harnessed.

He offered Mildred his hand, but she gave her father her arm, and stepped in. Mr. Osborne and the young man followed. The latter clucked to the horses, and they trotted away. The road lay for awhile between widely scattered houses and shacks, then it broke away into the open country, where the bridges across the ditches were

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precarious, and the sight of a human being a novel thing.

It was a silent party, for a strange embarrassment had fallen on the girl, and she replied to her father's bantering advances with none of her pretty retorts and tricks. Finally, Mr. Osborne turned to the driver and said, —

“You've quite a place out here, my friend Hopkins tells me.”

“Pretty fair, yes.”

“I've known Hopkins for a great many years, even before he had any interests at all in the West.”

“Yes.”

“I suppose he seldom visits you?”

“Very seldom.”

“Whenever he has spoken of his place here, he has always said that this man Hendrickson filled the bill completely.”

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"Yes, Hendrickson is a good man."

"I suppose you have been in his employ for some time?"

Just the ghost of a smile crossed the young man's brow, as he answered, "Yes, I've been here for some little while."

"What do you do, that is, mostly?" Mildred was nudging her father, but he was determined to be friendly.

"Oh, almost anything. I just knock around generally."

"Oh."

After this unproductive attempt at conversation, Mr. Osborne lapsed into silence. Surely, if the rest of the people on the ranch were no more loquacious, they would have a dull time of it. Well, Mildred had come out for climate, not for conversation.

The young lady herself kept her eyes straight before her. She did

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not like the taciturnity of their driver in face of her father's genial overtures. "It is all of a piece with the mistaken idea of democracy and equality in the West," she thought. "The idea has run wild. Independence has been superseded by insolence, and every labourer is so afraid of being put upon that his attitude is one of aggression or defiance toward his superiors." And she grew inwardly angry as she felt that the young man was looking at her out of the corner of his eye.

"That's just the trouble," her thoughts went on; "he has been partly educated, and that's what keeps him from knowing his place. Now, in England, it would be different; a servant would be respectful, at least. Even Nina is better. Well, we are different in the East."

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“I think you ’ll like it out here,” said the driver, “after you get used to the silence;” and she relented a little towards him. Perhaps he was only embarrassed, after all. Of course there were not many modest men; she had never seen one, but then, she had heard that there were such things.

“I am sure I shall like it,” said her father. “I need a little silence after the bustle and buzz of New York.”

“I should think you would.”

With this little talk, he drew up at the entrance of an enclosure, and leaping down, flung open a long barred gate. Through this the horses walked, and then waited until he closed it, when they resumed their journey up a road the counterpart of the former one, save that it lay through fenced ground. They must

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have proceeded about a mile when they came to a broad, low house. There was the barking of dogs within as the wagon stopped, and a big man, who would have been fair but for the sun's care, came running out to meet them. He was followed by a plump little woman.

"How do you do, Mr. Osborne?" said the man.

"This is Hendrickson," said the driver as they alighted.

"How do you do, Mr. Hendrickson?" said Mr. Osborne; "and this is my daughter, Miss Mildred Osborne. I have heard much of you from my friend Hopkins."

"We think a great deal of Mr. Hopkins out here, although we don't often see him. This is my wife," he added, as they neared the smiling little woman.

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Mr. Osborne bowed, and Mildred shook hands with her. She felt glad to see the face of another woman besides the silent maid. "Come right in." Then Hendrickson went on laughingly, —

"I hope you haven't had any trouble with Landry on the road."

"With Landry?" said Mr. Osborne questioninglly.

"Oh, yes; I don't reckon he's introduced himself to you. That's just like him, to drive eight miles with people, and never say who he is — Landry."

Mildred turned in time to see the driver, who was about going off with the team, flush beneath his tan. "Will he dare to introduce him? That's what he's going to do," she thought. "Well, this is too much of Western democracy."

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The young fellow had left his charges and strolled up, not without a certain grace in his bearing.

"This is our Mr. Landry, Mr. and Miss Osborne."

Mildred's bow was very slight.

"I shall give him special charge of your pleasure and comfort. He's better able to take care of you than I am." So they went into the house, and Landry went about his work.

The plump little woman took charge of Mildred and showed her to their rooms. There were four for her father, herself, and Nina, plainly furnished, but comfortable.

"*Mr. Landry*," mused the girl, as her maid was making her comfortable; "and he is to provide for our pleasure. Nina shall be my proxy there. Even on a ranch one must draw the line somewhere."

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Jack, one of the men, was leading the horses away from the wagon, when he turned to Landry and said, "Great gal, I tell you. What a face to —"

"What?"

Jack stopped.

"If ever I hear you speak that way of that young lady again I'll break every bone in your body," said the young man, calmly.

CHAPTER FIFTH

IF Mildred had expected the man Landry to force his attentions upon her, she was greatly mistaken. He gave her no occasion whatever to offer Nina's services as proxy. Hendrickson had fulfilled his promise, and left them much to the young ranchman's care. While, indeed, he was all that courtesy or hospitality could demand, all his offers of service were made to Mr. Osborne, and Mildred's presence or participation in the pleasures he provided was a mere incident. He seldom spoke to her except to answer some question, or to point out some place of interest as they journeyed to and fro

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about the ranch. She had not been there a week before she was compelled to change her ideas of Western democracy, and to admit that she had done Landry himself an injustice. What she could not understand was his attitude toward themselves, and the attitude of the men towards him. The former, while perfectly respectful, had nothing that could suggest the relation of master and servant. While there was nothing of assertiveness about his manner, he seemed to look upon them calmly as equals, and her father had already accepted him as such. But it was harder for the girl. There is, in every woman, a bit of the snob, and while it was at its lowest development in this clean, sweet, American maiden, she could not but feel a certain resentment at the cool way in

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which he took his acceptability for granted. She could not deny that his manners and his language were those of a gentleman, and she could not withhold a measure of admiration for his sturdy manhood, as she saw him hardy and alert at his labours, or swinging across the plains at the long lope which is the chief charm of the Western rider.

The men treated him with a peculiar mixture of comradeship and respect, which Mildred could attribute to nothing but his superior education, or perhaps his prowess with his fists, which she had always heard was a good foundation for respect in the West.

And while she mused and pondered over Landry, he went calmly on, treating her politely and letting her alone. Now, there was just

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enough of the coquette in Mildred's make-up for this sort of treatment to pique her. So it was in a spirit entirely feminine that she set out to compel the notice of the man whose attentions she had determined to resent.

With this end in view, she began to talk to Landry more, and to attempt to draw him out. No one could long resist Mildred's sweetness and charm, and this strange, reticent ranchman was no exception to the rule. He soon responded, and within three weeks the two young people were on a footing of pleasant companionship.

Landry talked more, though not much, but he found time to take the girl about the ranch, showing her things which he did not think Mr. Osborne would care for, and so did

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not trouble him about. He grew frankly to like her, and made no attempt to conceal it. Mildred often blushed at the honest admiration she saw in his gray eyes, and it gave her a thrill of something between pleasure and fright as she saw how his face would light up at unexpected meetings between them. A man whose face was such a tell-tale might be embarrassing sometimes. But it was pleasant to be liked in such a frank, honest way.

They rode and walked together, and he taught her how to shoot with the rifle. It gave him a quiet delight to saddle her pony for her with his own hands, and he taught her how to guide the intelligent little beast, as the cowboy does, by the mere inclination of her lithe body.

Meanwhile, Mr. Osborne looked on

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at the growing intimacy between them and made no attempt to check it. He liked Landry and did not see why Mildred should not do so, especially as he was the means of keeping her out in the open air, and the roses were coming back into her cheeks. Of course, this was a man's point of view.

Men are so unpractical about these things. A woman would have looked at the matter differently. Mrs. Annesley, now, for instance, would have scented danger as soon as she saw that Landry did not wear buckskins and a pistol. A man hardly entertains an idea of love in a case where a woman goes forward and postulates it.

So Landry and Mildred rode on toward the dreamland of romance, he consciously, gladly; she unknowing.

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It was one golden morning in October that he came to her saying, "I am going out to ride the fence, Miss Mildred. Some of the men report breaks in it somewhere along the west side. Won't you come with me?"

"Really, I ought to write letters this morning, Mr. Landry."

"Oh, please don't 'Mr.' Landry me," he said a little impatiently; "surely you've known me long enough to see that no one gives me 'Mr.,' and to do like them."

She looked at him in surprise.

"You must forgive me for being impatient," he went on. "But you know that 'Mr.' smells to me of civilisation, and it makes me feel stuffy."

"All right, I'll 'Mr.' you no more, then, Landry."

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“He smiled gladly. “And now, won’t you come?”

“I ought n’t to, but I will; and we’ll throw up the wide windows of the morning to remove the stuffy feeling.” She laughed gaily, and went in to put on her strong, gray habit.

They were soon out and in the saddle and galloping away over the plains, the sun in her eyes and the wind in her hair, and the joy of youth and freedom throbbing in her heart.

Landry looked at her in silence, a smile like a sunbeam lying on his lips. The desire to possess her rose up and grew strong in his being. What a glory it would be to hold this light, airy creature against the world, to anticipate all her wants, and to supply them!

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The morning was like a song, so sweet it was half sad. The air was like wine, and so clear that the farthest mountain ranges looked near and neighbourly. The alfalfa fields, with their deep, dark green, half sprung from the third cutting, stood out in deep contrast to the browns and yellows which are Colorado's prevailing autumn tints. The sky was a dream of blue and white, with a touch of crimson over a peak where the sun had lately come up. The mysterious, ever-changing mountains were clothed in a morning veil of pale opal light, except in the hollows, where the darkness of shadow turned it to lavender and purple.

Mildred looked like the child of the day and rode like the spirit of the wind, and for a long time neither she nor Landry said anything. They

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were too busy just enjoying what Nature had given them. After awhile she drew rein, and turned to him smiling.

"I wonder what my people at home would say of this weak plant if they could see me now."

"You have thrived in the sunshine, and they could only be thankful."

Just then a jack-rabbit flashed across their path, a mere leaping bundle of gray-white, and he laughed aloud at the joy she had in the sight.

"They would say for one thing that your capacity for enjoyment was in no way diminished by coming out here."

"I wonder," Mildred laughed, "if they could believe that there was anything to enjoy in this desert."

"I don't like to hear it called a desert. It is full of teeming life to

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me; with things to see and things to love and to do."

"Oh, but they would never understand that unless they had seen it for themselves. I know I did n't. Why, I had a letter from my sister in the mail that you brought yesterday, and she asked me if you wore many pistols, or were at all careless in handling firearms. I had written her about you," — blushing.

Landry laughed a good deal longer than the humour of the remark demanded. But he was laughing out of pure joy because she had thought of him and had written about him. The impulse seized him to speak then and know his fate, and he was only able to check it by darting away on the pretended chase of another rabbit. He came back laughing.

"What an awful opinion they must

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have of us!" he said. "I wonder they let you come out here."

"It was not without many admonitions from my aunt to be careful of cowboys and catamounts — that was quite the nearest to the concrete she could bring the West, and so she seized on that. I really don't believe that she regards this part of the country as civilised."

"Nothing is quite so conceited as what we call civilisation; and what does it mean after all, except to lie gracefully, to cheat legally, and to live as far away from God and Nature as the world limit will let. If it must mean that out here, pray God that it may never come to this part of the country. If it does, then some of us will have no refuge."

Mildred looked at him with wide eyes. "Why are you so bitter?" she

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asked. "Now, I think that civilisation is very good when it treats us well. Maybe it didn't treat you well, though. Anyway, I'm glad to know one thing, that papa is wrong. He says that every one who has a chance to live in the heart of the world, and yet comes here, must be driven either by consumption, cupidity, or crime.

"No, some of us come to get breathing space, when we are stifled back there by meanness and deceit. Some of us come here to look at the great mountains and broad plains, and forget how little man is; to see Nature, and, through it, Nature's God, and so get back to faith."

His face was flushed, and his manner vehement, and Mildred thought she had offended him.

"Oh, you must n't mind papa's remark; he was only trying to make an

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epigram. You know it's the fashion to make epigrams now, alliterative, if possible, but epigrams of some kind. They are supposed to be philosophical short-cuts."

"Yes, I know; they are a kind of electric-lighted royal road to truth, but I confess, I never did like electric lights. But you must forgive me for making a shadow on your day."

"You have n't," she said simply.

They had come to one of the breaks in the fence now, and he had dismounted to see what could be done, and, if possible, to make repairs. He went at his work cheerfully, almost joyously. Mildred watched him for a time, and then she asked suddenly, "Do you really like it, Landry?"

He looked up in surprise, "Why, yes; why not?"

"Oh, I don't know," she answered,

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blushing, "but it does n't seem like you; it seems so trivial, inadequate, inconsequential; oh, I don't know what I mean."

"Why, it's work; I'm doing something."

"But would n't you rather be doing something else?"

"I don't see that I should. I'm not only mending fences out here; that would be trivial perhaps, although even fence-mending has its place, and farther south they have men who do nothing else but ride the fence day after day. But besides this, we are digging a new irrigation ditch, and, altogether, I'm bearing my share in the work of feeding the world. What man can do more?"

"Oh, yes, I know, — but — but —" she paused, embarrassed.

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Landry laughed and went on: "You see, Miss Mildred, it isn't what a man does, but how he does it. I love work, not for work's sake, but for what it accomplishes, although I do find a certain pleasure in the process."

"But don't you know, Landry, pardon me if I seem impertinent, you might have made a good soldier, or an officer," she said diffidently.

"I don't know that I should want to be," he said calmly; and then dropping his work he went on: "I know it isn't heroic, but I don't know that those fellows, brave as they may be, who are out there fighting a lot of half-naked savages are doing any more for ultimate good than we who are here, fighting the hard conditions of nature. I like a fight, but there are fights and

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fights, and I'd rather know that this irrigation ditch that I'm digging is going to make the land better and a lot of people happier, than to feel that I was carrying a cartridge-belt full of civilisation to folks that didn't want it."

"Oh, shame! shame! you're an anti-expansionist," said Mildred.

"No, I'm not an anti-expansionist, either. I believe in America's spreading out as big and as broad as she can, and doing all the good she can. But whenever I look around me on all this—" he swept his eyes around the horizon,— "I cannot help thinking that there's a good deal of expanding to be done at home."

"Would you recall the men from the Philippines?"

"I would n't recall anybody or anything. Those fellows for that work,

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and every man to his liking. But I do say that a good many of those boys who are out there wasting their lives under suns that weren't made to shine on anybody but niggers, might be better employed out here in God's country, where every air is a blessing, helping to make a paradise of this land that's so near it already."

"Why, Landry, you're really eloquent when you get started."

"Pardon me," he said, blushing under his tan; "I've been blowing off a good deal, but I was so full of it."

With Landry's work the morning went quickly, and it was past noon when they started riding leisurely back to the ranch-house.

"I wish you could help me brighten things for the boys out here a little,"

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he said. "Their lives are sometimes dull. I've been thinking of giving them some music one of these nights. I have a violin and a guitar."

"You have?" she exclaimed. "Why, you never told me."

"No, I'm not much of a musician; but you have a banjo, and I could make shift if you could help me. Will you?"

She hesitated. He was so blunt, so direct. Why could n't he hint at things, and give her a chance?

"Will you?" he repeated.

"Yes," she answered at last.

And as they alighted at the door, and he held her hand in saying good-bye, she wondered what manner of man was this Landry, who hated civilisation and yet practised all its graces.

CHAPTER SIXTH

“PAPA,” said Mildred when she and her father were alone again, “that Mr. Landry has very queer ideas.”

“Is that so, my dear? He surely does n’t maintain that the moon is made of green cheese?”

“No, no; but he does maintain something almost as heretical, — the heroism of common labour.”

“Oh, he preaches that doctrine, does he, he being the common labourer, eh?”

“Well, he does n’t say quite that either; for, as I remember now, he said that he was n’t heroic, but he claims that the men who make a

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farm or a ranch better are as good and as great as the men who are fighting in the Philippines."

Mr. Osborne laughed, then said musingly, "I've seen men in my day whom I regard as greater generals than any our war has yet produced, and their battle-fields were only offices and counting-rooms, too. Landry is right. He has a great deal of sound sense for a man in his station."

"His station? That's just it. Papa, what is his station?"

Mr. Osborne paused and looked at her. "Well, now that is one on me. Come to think of it, I have never considered the matter. He is not a man whose character or manner lends itself to much speculation about station. One feels so sure about his manhood that he forgets to ask about the status of it."

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"But I do want very much to know," the daughter pursued. "He has asked me to help him in a little entertainment for the men, and I have told him I would."

"Oh, well, that won't hurt you. It will be a good thing for the men, and out here you can afford to be pretty democratic, although Landry strikes me as being a man one couldn't well be ashamed of anywhere."

It pleased Mildred so to hear her father say this of Landry that she immediately resented both her feeling and his remark.

"I must say, papa, that you do make some sudden and enthusiastic friendships."

"I am seldom wrong, though," the old man returned.

And so the girl's mind was set at

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rest as to the fitness of her helping Landry in his entertainment for the men, or the "boys," as he more often called them.

Somehow the young man seemed to find even more spare time than usual that week, and much of it was spent in practising with her. Sometimes it was the violin and the banjo, sometimes it was the banjo alone, and as often it tinkled to the heavier strumming of the guitar, and they laughed and enjoyed it and were glad they had thought of this plan of entertaining the boys.

And so the days went on, and the night of the concert arrived, — a moonlight night, with a cool wind blowing down from the mountain after a hot day. The ranch-house was a scene of repressed joy. Repressed, for your ranchman prides

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himself on his stoicism, and holds the concealment of his emotion a great virtue. Young Tod, though, the youngest of the helpers, had been insane with delight, and was doing fancy steps before the door an hour and a half earlier than the hour set for the festivities.

The general dining-room, a long wainscoted chamber, had been fitted up with chairs and settees as the audience hall, and all the lamps and lanterns obtainable had been brought into requisition to make it bright and cheerful. Little less pleased than Tod, Mr. Hendrickson came in as soon as it was decently near the time of beginning and seated himself near the centre of the room, smiling and dumb with joy. His wife was flying around, as Tod expressed it, "like a chicken with its head wrung

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off," very busy putting the finishing touches to things, and saying an admonishing word to the boys, who were dropping in, one by one.

A lamp flared and smoked, and a half-dozen willing pairs of hands were up to attend to it, and as many faces, bronzed and mellow in the light, bent over it, smiling to be of service.

When it was time to begin, Mr. Osborne came in with Mildred and the banjo, and they were greeted with a burst of uproarious applause. The old man looked a little embarrassed and sank quickly into a seat, where he sat smiling upon the scene as if it were all a play and he had been unexpectedly cast for a part. Mildred blushed like a peony, and began tuning her banjo to relieve her confusion. The entrance of

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Landry a little later with his violin and guitar was the signal for another outburst. The rancher only smiled as he took his seat beside Mildred, and she made the mental comment that surely this man was different from those around him.

In order to get things going, Landry struck a few chords on his guitar, and he and Mildred swung into one of the liveliest of Sousa's marches. It is just possible that none of the musical societies had recommended the banjo and guitar as two instruments especially adapted for such work. But these bronzed, hard-handed fellows, so far away from the pleasures and amusements of the town, isolated from their fellows, the companions of cattle,—they were not critics. The music, light though it was, gave them the hint of the bet-

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ter, brighter things outside their own barren lives, and never was a performance so thoroughly enjoyed. Fingers were snapped, and feet were stamped in time to the strain, and some even joined to whistle softly the air.

Encouraged by these signs of appreciation, Mildred's fingers fairly flew over the strings. She had entered heart and soul into the spirit of the affair. Her face was flushed and her eyes were shining. No wonder that Landry could not see the men around him, nor the room, nor hear the applause which greeted the music. All his senses were absorbed in one, and that one was wholly devoted to drinking her in with his eager eyes.

Finally, though, he awakened, and in response to a vociferous encore

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they began another tune. After this he called out to Tod, —

“Come on, now, Tod, and give us your rancher’s song.”

“Tod! Tod!” chorused the others.

Tod ducked his head and sat still. He was embarrassed by the presence of Mildred who seemed to him like a being from another sphere.

“Come on, Tod,” repeated Landry, striking his guitar, “the boys’ll join in the chorus. Won’t you, boys?”

“That’s what!” they shouted, and “You bet!”

Thus adjured, Tod rose from his seat, but at the sight of the faces looking at him, collapsed into it again, like a scared schoolboy on exhibition day.

There was a burst of laughter at this, but it stopped suddenly, for Mildred was standing up, speaking.

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"Won't you come on and sing, please?" she was saying. "I should feel very badly if I thought you felt strange before papa and me."

"Go on! you can't refuse the lady," the men urged; and Tod rose again a little less embarrassed and shuffled forward. He bowed awkwardly to Mildred as he came out and gave her a look. It was such a look as one of the rude shepherds, half-startled, half-uplifted, might have bent on the angels with the glad tidings. It was as if the purity of the girl had suddenly metamorphosed the man's whole nature and the light of the change was made manifest in his eyes.

Landry saw the look, and the insane desire took possession of him to get up and hug Tod. But he only said, "Go on," and struck up the tune.

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Tod began to sing the "Ranchman's Song," one of the few clean ones in the plainsman's répertoire, —

"The ranchman's life is the life for me, —
A wild, sweet life indeed;
By day, the sun on the mesa free,
By night, the mad stampede.

CHORUS.

A long lope, and a slow lope,
That is the gait we ride;
But who would change the life of the range
For the city and all its pride?

This is the life for the man who feels
The warm blood in his veins;
To sit him straight when his pony wheels,
And to skim the melting plains.

CHORUS.

I have no wife, no kin have I,
I bide alone and free;
But cattle, plains, and hill and sky
Are wife enough for me.

CHORUS.

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I have no house, and I have no home,
So, comrades, when I die
Just plant me here, where the cattle roam,
And you will still ride by.

CHORUS.

The men roared the chorus out lustily, and the song ended with a great flourish. Then a banjo solo by Mildred ran the men wild again, and while they were still shouting over the encore she played, Landry began singing to the accompaniment of his own guitar. A hush fell upon the room, and Mildred looked at him in surprise. His voice was a rich baritone—the voice for a man—and he sang with deep feeling, even emotion. It was only a simple ballad,—such as one may hear from the ballad-singer any time at a music hall,—but the manner of the singing was instant in its effect. The men began

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clearing their throats and looking down at their boots. Tod got up and stood with his back to the rest; looking at the wall as if he saw a picture there; nor did he turn around when Landry had finished, but swept his sleeve quickly and surreptitiously across his eyes and joined in the hearty applause. The men straightened up and began smiling sheepishly at each other; and not one of them would have admitted to another the presence of the great lump in his throat.

Mildred found her own lashes wet as she joined Landry, and they broke into the inspiring strains of the "Georgia Camp-Meeting." The change was instantaneous. The men, like great children, were as quickly swayed from grief to joy, or the reverse. The music got into their blood

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like fire, and the imp of dancing tickled their feet. Tod suddenly left his corner, and springing into the middle of the floor, began to dance wildly, but not ungracefully. There was the hasty pushing back of chairs and a half-dozen men joined him. Embarrassment and restraint were forgotten in the momentary excitement. Even Hendrickson was taken by the infection, and seizing his plump little wife, spun her dizzily about the room. Tod danced his way toward Nina and then paused before her, bowing. The maid gave a startled glance toward Mildred, who nodded, and a moment later she was flying away in the arms of the happy rancher, who laughed at the envious faces of his comrades.

When the tune had been played through there were loud cries of

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“Again! Again!” and it was repeated to the hilarious joy of the dancers. Nina came back breathless from the exertion.

“Oh, Miss Mildred,” she gasped, “I don’t know what you’ll think of me!”

“I’ll think you’ve been enjoying yourself like a sensible girl,” replied Mildred.

“Mr. Tod is a nice dancer, of course —”

“I abhor conventionality,” interrupted Mildred. Her father heard her and smiled at her. He was satisfied, for she was happy.

They played once more, and then Landry announced that the concert was over. The men took their hats and crowded to the door; but there they stopped and looked hungrily back.

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Mildred will never know why she did it, save that something in their eyes compelled it and made her forget herself, and she swung her banjo into position and began playing softly, "Home, Sweet Home."

Landry did not attempt to accompany her, but stood gazing at her in admiration and delight. The men were transfixed. Again Tod turned to the wall, and there were honest tears in the eyes of some of the fellows.

"Good-night, and thanks," they said when she had finished; and then they stepped out as if afraid to disturb something that she had put to sleep within them. But once outside, their restraint fell off like a mantle from their shoulders, and they rent the night air with three cheers for the lady and three more for Landry.

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Mildred looked at Landry as she took her father's arm. "What great children they are," she said.

"You have made them very happy to-night," Landry returned, "and I thank you for helping me."

"Don't thank me," she said. "I feel selfish, I am so happy. I am happier than I have ever been."

"I am so glad, and the boys will not forget this, you may rest assured. We always try to have something like this for them before the fall round-up, but there has been none like this."

"The fall round-up, what is that? "

"We get together all the cattle twice a year,—in the spring and fall, when we drive them from the ranges down into the valley. Next week is time for the fall driving."

"Oh! may I see it? "

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“It is a rather rough experience, but I will try my best to help you to a sight of it. You will go, Mr. Osborne?”

“I shall be greatly interested.”

“Oh, thank you, Landry. Good-night.”

“Good-night,” said Landry, and under his breath, “God bless you!”

CHAPTER SEVENTH

A WHOLE week passed, a happy week, full of the joy of out-door life for Mildred. She saw herself acquiring both gaiety and health, the reward one gains by living near to Nature's heart. She was not yet done babbling of the pleasure the concert had given her, and her father went on, smiling, happy too, and unseeing. The poor man thought it really was the concert that had pleased his daughter, and brought a light into her eyes and a thrill into her voice that he had never known there before now. A girl may be of a very charitable disposition, and Mildred was such a one, but there are certain effects on the feminine

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nature which even the joy of doing good cannot produce. She had suddenly become more affectionate than usual with her father, and she had fallen into the way of running to him on the impulse of the moment, and throwing her arms around his neck with quick, unaccounted for kisses. Her father called it pecking, took it gladly, and attributed it all to returning health — and the concert.

The girl developed a hundred pretty little ways, which, notwithstanding her charm, she had not possessed before. She was as gay and as joyous as a bird and as irresponsible. She went about the place singing, and the men looked on and blessed her. Little Mrs. Hendrickson adored her, while her husband's admiration seriously interfered with his articulateness whenever the sprightly maiden

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was around. Meanwhile, Mildred herself had not analysed her feelings. She was just glad. Glad as a robin is, or a squirrel, and she did not know that it was because Landry was near her that her life was so much like a holiday. She was content to take the joy without questioning whence it came. But she was destined to an unpleasant awakening.

When God is letting a revelation slowly illumine the mind and soul of one of his creatures, there is too often some fool to rush in and anticipate his process. This was the part upon which Mrs. Annesley now entered. Although she was nearly three thousand miles away, she felt what Mr. Osborne on the spot could not see. With the solicitude of the kindly intentioned destroyer, she wrote Mildred: —

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“MY DEAR CHILD, — I feel it my duty [they always do feel it their duty] to mention a thing which both your dear sister and myself have noticed in your last letters. You know, my dear Mildred, I am the last person in the world whom any one could accuse of being suspicious ; but there are certain circumstances which make me feel that I should be doing less than my duty to you as the daughter of my dear deceased sister did I fail to warn you of what I fear. My dear, who is this man Landry, and what are your relations with him? Are you aware, child, that you have spoken of him in every one of your last letters? Do you know that in the very last you called his name six times? [Mildred felt that she knew just the manner in which her aunt would have shot that last question at her could she have been there in person, and her face was suffused with angry blushes. The letter went on.] From what I can understand from your letters, the fellow is a common cowboy, or, I hesitate at the word, — cow-puncher, as I have heard them

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called. Dear, let me beg you not to disgrace your family. I have heard of young girls falling in love with such persons out of a mistaken sense of the romantic. Don't do it, Mildred. Think over what I have said, and confide in me. If necessary, Helen and I will come out to see after you. Helen may come now, as Mr. Berkeley has spoken. I hope that I do not anticipate your sister in telling you this, but she would have told you soon anyway.

"One more thing, my dear niece, and I am done. It has been brought to my ears that the women of Colorado are advocating riding their horses astride. Horrors! And have made an appeal to the country on the score of humanity. Oh, Mildred, I cannot even contemplate the spectacle of a niece of mine *astride* a horse. [Mrs. Annesley underscored her "astride" as she had done her questions about Landry.] Don't do it, my dear. Propriety in a girl of your station is very much more necessary than humanity. The poor can afford to be humane. The rich cannot afford to be less than proper.

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"Ask your dear blind father where his eyes are, and believe me,

"Your affectionate aunt,

"ANNE ANNESLEY."

Mildred finished the letter, and flinging it across the room, burst into tears. There should be a penalty imposed upon the old woman who wounds the maiden modesty of a young girl. Mildred cried for very shame, but she was not without the temper to resent her aunt's letter.

"Aunt Annesley," she exclaimed through her tears, "is a meddling, narrow-minded old woman. I in love with Landry, indeed!" And then she blushed so hotly that she hid her face in her arms and wept the more, and in that moment it went very hard for Landry. The sins of Mrs. Annesley were visited upon his head. "He is very presumptuous," Mildred

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thought, "and no doubt took it for granted that I cared for him, just because I was kind to him. He has been no more than my groom, and I'd as soon think of marrying the butler. Oh, how I hate Aunt Annesley!"

The girl's pride was wounded to the quick, and it is a quality which women and snakes have in common, when wounded, to strike, regardless of reason, at everything near, and so Mildred felt angry with every one about, as being concerned in her humiliation. She sat down and wrote a brief, curt note to her-aunt: —

"MY DEAR AUNT [it ran], — I am exceedingly glad to hear that Mr. Berkeley has proposed. It relieves you of one great responsibility. I can assure you also that I am not riding astride, nor am I going to marry Landry, who has been little more than a faithful groom to me."

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That was all, and it was unworthy of her; but who can blame a young girl, hurt as she was, for being unjust to every one about her? She read the note through again and again, and the meanness of it struck her more and more each time. Finally, she tore it into shreds. "I won't send it," she cried, "I won't send it. She may think as she pleases."

Very sad and miserable she felt as she went out-of-doors to the shelving roof which did duty as a porch, and where her father was now sitting with his cigar.

"Why, what is it, my dear?" exclaimed Osborne. "You're not looking well."

"I'm feeling very well," she replied. But I've been reading letters from home."

"And you're homesick? Well, I

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don't wonder, child. But Landry shall cheer you up."

It was like a match to the fuse. She turned upon her father, all the pain of her resentment and humiliation flashing in her eyes and thrilling in her voice. "I am sure, papa, I don't see why I must depend upon Landry for amusement," she said angrily.

"Why, I thought you and he were such friends."

"We are not friends. I am surprised that you want your daughter to make friends with the servants. I have ridden with him because there was nothing else to do."

"Why, Mildred," said her father, in surprise, "I am sorry if I have seemed to neglect you. I — I — thought —"

He stopped helplessly.

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“ Oh, every one thinks,” she said a little brutally. And then, there was Landry approaching, swinging along with his swift, easy stride. She gave him one glance and then turned and went into the house.

He saw the action and wondered. What had he done to offend her? He would rather his right arm were cut off than that he should give her pain. He came up awkwardly and stammered a few commonplaces to Mr. Osborne, who was equally puzzled and embarrassed; but his mind was with the girl who had so palpably turned her back upon him.

What had he done? What had he done? He went away cursing himself for a blundering fool, who had stupidly wounded the woman he loved and yet had not sense enough to know how he had done it.

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“At least, civilisation has that much good in it,” he told himself, “that I could not wound a woman without knowing when and how. But I’ll find out. I’ll find out, damn it, if I have to crawl to her on my knees.”

He did not know — how could he? — that he was being made to suffer on account of a meddling old woman three thousand miles away.

When Mildred had gone in, she instantly regretted the act, and suffered in mind little less than Landry himself. After all, it was not his fault. He had possibly never thought of love in connection with her at all. But she was conscious of no great pleasure in the thought. She felt that she ought to be glad, for, of course, it was impossible that she could be anything to him or he to her. But, nevertheless, she was mis-

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erable, and it was a miserable dinner that she ate that day. In the afternoon she sat on the porch with her father, and tried to be cheerful, as was her wont; but her cheerfulness had departed, and she made but a sorry feint at it. She wanted to be just to Landry. She wanted to make amends to him, but she feared herself, and was frightened if she even heard his step. Finally, after several false alarms, he did turn the corner of the house, and start towards her. Oh, if she could only fly! Of course he had seen her displeasure of the morning and would be sure to ask the cause of it, and what could she say? She wished he would n't be so fearfully direct. He never hinted at a thing. He always spoke straight out, and there was no getting away from the point with him. She had

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observed this before in him. She bit her lips and waited, because she dared not snub him again. It was awful. She could see his face now. A sort of fascination held her eyes. There were lines of pain about his mouth. She had hurt him, she knew, and she did not know how to tell him why, so the prayer went up from her soul that something might intervene to prevent their meeting.

Mildred's prayer was unexpectedly answered. A wagon rattled up to the entrance, and a man got out and stood for a moment talking to the driver. Then he turned and came hurriedly towards them. Landry had stopped, and as the newcomer drew nearer, turned his eyes first upon him and then upon Mildred. She felt the blood leave her face, and in a moment she seemed to have lived

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the space of a century. It was Arthur Heathcote.

“Awful of me to drop down on you in this way,” said Heathcote, after greeting them; “but you know I’ve been out this way before, and I thought I’d like to see the country again, so here I am. I’m so glad to see you, Miss Osborne, and you, Mr. Osborne.”

He lied very glibly, but his face was red and he looked like a guilty schoolboy.

Osborne was frankly glad to see him, but even Mildred herself realised that her greeting was cold and formal.

“Thought maybe your people might put me up for a week or two. Of course, I did n’t know. If they can’t, why, I’ll be trotting along.”

“Of course they can,” said Osborne, heartily. “Landry!”

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Landry came forward; the two men were introduced. Each eyed the other as if taking stock of his strength and fighting ability.

“Won’t you try to help us locate Heathcote?”

“I shall be glad to,” said Landry, but his face belied him.

They went into the house, and the Englishman was soon placed. Mrs. Hendrickson was overcome with joy at being able to oblige any friend of Mr. Osborne’s, and they could and would put Mr. Heathcote up for as long as he wanted to stay. So his luggage was brought in from the road, and he settled himself, like the thorough Britisher he was, at home wherever he took off his hat.

After doing what he could for the new arrival, Landry came out of the house again. But this time he did

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not go toward Mildred. He only bowed to her as he passed, and went with set face out toward the barn.

Mildred could have wept from very grief and vexation. She knew what he must think of her, and her face burned. He would believe that she had known of Heathcote's proposed visit, and had snubbed him that he might be conveniently out of the way. Oh, the shame of it! The meanness of her nature as he must see it! She was glad that he had been proud enough to pass her by. She could not respect a man who would stoop to a woman who had acted as contemptibly as she had appeared to act. But then her thoughts took another turn. He should not have thought it of her. He had no grounds for believing her so low. But then, what did she

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care? She didn't. She knew she didn't care, for she told herself so several times before Arthur Heathcote came out to talk to her.

Her feelings as she saw him approaching were a study, even to herself. She could not forget the big-hearted Englishman's simple kindness that wet September night, when she had made the child the object of her impulsive charity. She liked him, but she was angry at his intrusion. Here she had been living so close to Nature, and now he had come smelling of civilisation—in her thoughts she unconsciously quoted Landry—to break up her paradise. Perhaps her aunt had sent him. Maybe he knew about Landry. Had he come to spy upon her actions? But she dismissed the thought as soon as it was formed. That was

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not like Heathcote; but oh! she wished he had not come. However, he was here, and coming towards her smiling now. The sky that she had loved had lost its colour. The sunset which she had looked at with Landry beside her was devoid of glory. Everything seemed dull and gray to her, and all because a foolish old woman had written a letter, and an unwelcome lover had come at the wrong hour, and a hard-headed girl had refused to listen to the dictates of her heart.

“I am afraid, Miss Mildred, that you will think hardly of my racing out here.”

“I cannot blame you for wanting to see the country again. I love it myself.”

“Yes; but I mean for coming out here after you.”

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"Surely that would not be fair, unless you blamed me for coming before you."

"That 's so. But now you 're laughing at me again. Indeed you are. But, you know, I thought you would n t care if I just came."

"I am sure I don't."

Poor fellow! he was helpless and inarticulate after that.

"Of course, you know why I came."

"You have already told me it was because you had been out here before, and you wished to see the country again. A very good reason for coming."

"Oh, come now," Heathcote protested; "you know I was just telling a few then. Mildred, you know why I came. It was because I could n't stay away from you. I could n't take no for an answer."

"Arthur," she said sadly, "you make it so hard for me."

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"Forgive me," he broke in, "I don't want to persecute you. Really, I did n't intend speaking until time for me to go away."

"Arthur," she said again, "I do like you, but won't you give up hoping or thinking that I will marry you? I cannot. I cannot."

There was a decided set to Arthur Heathcote's chin as he replied, "I will not give up hope until you are the wife of some other man, but I won't persecute you. I love you, Mildred, and a love like mine is not to be daunted. Now, let's not think any more of it while I am out here. Let's be good friends, for I believe you when you say that you like me, and we can have a pleasant unrestrained time, if you will let me walk with you and ride with you."

"You shall walk with me, and you

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shall ride with me, Arthur, and I wish I could say more."

"Oh, I have time," he said, and there was a shake in his voice, in spite of the brave ring of it, "and after that, there is eternity." Then he laughed. "Oh, I say, I like your man, Landry, although I can't understand him. A cowboy who talks like a college man is something of a paradox, you know."

"That is not a strange thing. Every American is a paradox, unless he happens to be an Anglomaniac."

"I like the paradoxes better. It's what we expect of Americans. I don't like this sudden turn for friendship and all that between us. We haven't got a soul, now, to whet our boys' belligerent appetites against, and whom have you?"

"Oh, we feel our loss as greatly as

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you do. But then, we have a little trouble on our hands."

"Yes, but that's only a brush. Inferiors never make good enemies. A fellow could never have a real jolly fight with his valet. He might kick the man, but kicking a man is not fighting him."

"Well, you should n't complain, at least. England did find metal more attractive among the Boers."

"That's the reason she went to it, like steel to the magnet."

It was in this way that Mildred and Arthur talked on, building up a wall of conversation behind which to hide, — the girl, with her torn heart and wounded pride, the man hopeless, in spite of his bravery, saying bantering nothings while his face was white and drawn.

CHAPTER EIGHTH

LANDRY'S feelings were severely hurt when he supposed that Mildred had merely made use of him, and then tossed him away like a soiled glove. It did not seem like her, and his grief was not so much for himself as for the ideal he had had of her, which was now shattered. A man may lose faith in manhood, and his nature suffer a severe wrench, but for him to lose faith in womanhood, which means, to the average man, one woman upon whom he has staked all his beliefs and hopes, often proves the breaking of him.

But, hurt as he was, it would not have been in Landry's nature to sulk long. He was too vigorous and

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direct, and his love being stronger than his resentment, he would eventually have gone to Mildred, and have had it out with her. But it was reserved for Heathcote, unconsciously, to hasten the event. Unconsciously, yes; not that he would not have done it knowingly had he been aware how matters stood.

It was the morning after his arrival that he sought out Landry where he was wandering disconsolately among the horses, unable to conceal his unrest.

“I say, Mr. Landry,” said Heathcote, “I’m afraid I’m bothering you awfully, you know, but I want to see you for a moment.”

“Here I am,” said Landry, not too pleasantly; and then he added, somewhat to soften the speech, “and at your service.”

“I was thinking maybe you might

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help me to a mount. I don't like to ask Mr. Osborne, you know, as I dropped down on them rather unexpectedly, and it seems mean to trouble them."

Landry in a moment was all alert. "Why, I thought they were expecting you," he said.

"Oh, no, neither of them knew anything about me until I turned up here."

"I shall be glad to help you to a mount, Mr. Heathcote; just come with me." There was a sudden cordiality in Landry's manner that quite took possession of Heathcote. In fact, Heathcote might have had all the horses on the ranch just at that moment with Landry's joyous permission. His troubles fell away from him as the black shadows fall from the mountains before the sun. He

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was all life and heart again, though he could not but blame himself for having doubted Mildred's honesty, even for a moment. Evidently, he had offended her in some small way, and he would go to her and find out what it was and make it all right. His ideal was re-instated, whole and without a blemish. The goddess was again in her shrine, and he was very happy.

There was a great joy in Heathcote's breast, too, for the mount with which Landry provided him filled him with unspeakable admiration. It was Landry's own horse, so generous was that young man. She was a big roan, raw-boned and strong-limbed. A small, well-formed head was well set on her solid shoulders.

"What a beauty, what a beauty!" said Heathcote.

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“You ’ll find her as good as she is beautiful,” said Landry, with pardonable vanity.

“My knees are really itching to be astride of her.”

“If you have nothing to do, get on and try her.”

The next moment the Englishman was in the saddle, whence he beamed on Landry. The horse moved off at her easy gait. This was too much for Heathcote. The pure air and the wide plain brings out the natural in a man, and it was something of a reversion to primitive instincts when the delighted rider tossed his hand in the air and gave a whoop. He would not have believed it possible had any one predicted it of him. He felt the enthusiasm of a strong man for fine animals, and dimly, too, something of the influence of the vast

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life about him. He circled back to Landry, his face glowing, and the gladness of a big, unspoiled boy showing in his eyes.

"I say," he exclaimed, "are you really going to let me ride her? Aren't you depriving yourself now?"

"She's yours as long as you are here," said Landry, "and I'm glad you like her."

"Mr. Landry," said Heathcote, reaching down his hand as solemnly as if it were a ceremonial, "if ever you come to England, you shall have the finest horse in my stable."

"Thank you."

The two men shook hands and were friends from that moment. Three things draw men close,—to suffer, to dare, and to enjoy together; and they found a fellow-feeling in their very gladness. Heathcote for-

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got the traditions of his people, forgot to ask whence Landry came; whether he were cowboy, stable-man, or what. He only knew him for a good fellow. They were two strong, clean men, face to face, each drunk with the joy of living and loving. What more was needed to make them friends?

The Englishman rode away towards the ranch-house, and his friend looked after him. He saw a fine rider and a fine man, such a one as might have taken any woman's heart captive.

"It'll be a hard fight," said Landry, musingly, "but it will be a square one; and if I lose, I'll have the satisfaction of losing to a worthy fellow. Oh, well—" and he fell a-thinking.

It was because of all this that Mildred Osborne had the misfortune to grow very angry that morning.

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Heathcote came riding toward her, and she saw that he sat Landry's horse. Resentment flashed instantly into her heart. "Landry has no right to deprive himself. Maybe he thinks it will please me." Then she stopped saying things to herself, and said "Good-morning" in response to Heathcote's bow.

"Your man, Landry —" he began.

"Pardon me, Mr. Heathcote," she broke in, "but he is not my man, Landry. Mr. Landry is a gentleman, and quite our equal." She didn't know why she said it, for she did not know anything about the antecedents of Landry.

"Oh, beg pardon, Miss Mildred, I might have known that. Americans are so eccentric, you know. But the fact of the matter is that I never stopped to think what Landry was.

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I only knew that he was a fine fellow. I was just going to say that he loaned me his horse. Don't you think she is a fine animal? "

"She is; and he is so attached to her that I really don't know what he'll do without her."

"That's right, and I'm a selfish beast. I'll go straight — "

"Oh, no! no! you won't do anything of the kind. He would feel very much hurt."

"Oh, but I can't help it. It's not fair to take such a mount from a fellow," and he was turning as he spoke.

"Please don't," pleaded Mildred; "please don't, for my sake. That is," she stammered, "he would never forgive me for speaking."

"But he sha'n't know that you have spoken."

He was looking at her keenly, and

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with a question in his eyes. She blushed furiously under his gaze, and fingered her dress nervously as she spoke.

“Perhaps you don’t know, but Landry, Mr. Landry, is very eccentric.”

“Indeed?”

“Oh, yes.”

If he would only stop looking at her in that way. She knew that her face was guilty, and that she was fast getting angry again, both with herself and with her inquisitor.

“Then if you insist, I shall not take the horse back. I shall go for a spin. Won’t you come with me?”

“I shall not ride this morning,” she returned.

“Is it wrong for me to remind you of your promise?”

“I have not forgotten my promise, but I shall not ride this morning.”

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"I must bid you good-morning, then. I cannot lose the pleasure of this horse's gait, even for so fair a lady as yourself," and laughing, he rode away, leaving her there, helplessly embarrassed, and with the idea knocking at her consciousness that she had made something of a fool of herself.

Landry found her still sitting on the porch when he came up a little later. While she would not own it to herself, the girl had practically been waiting and wishing for him, but now she was frightened at his approach.

"May I sit down?" he said, after greeting her.

"To be sure," she answered; "you know we are all generosity here. We give people our horses, and let them sit on their own chairs."

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"The horse was nothing, but a chair here is everything. I have offended you. Won't you tell me how, and forgive me?"

"But you have not offended me, Landry. Why should you think so?" She felt how deceitful she was even as she said it.

"I am so glad," he said, humbly; "but you turned your back on me yesterday."

"It was very rude of me, wasn't it? But that was not on account of anything you had done. I had received a letter —" she hesitated "—and it provoked me very much. Of course, I had no right to take it out on you. But then, Landry, you don't know women very well, do you?"

"I don't know anything except that I am the happiest man on

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earth. Let's go for a ride," he added abruptly.

"No, I don't want to ride since you have n't your horse."

"Then let's walk. It's too glorious to sit still."

He must have meant all he said, for his face showed it.

"I'll walk with you;" and she ran into the house to get her hat. Why was the day suddenly bright again, and why were her feet so light? It was because she had righted a wrong, she soberly told herself. That was the reason, too, that she came out singing.

"I've been so miserable," said Landry, as they strolled along the cactus-dotted land. "I — I — had thoughts."

"A very rare thing for a young man," she answered laughingly.

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"But you don't know," he went on gravely; "I wronged you greatly in my mind."

"I knew what you thought," she said, "but you were wrong. I am not that kind." She had grown serious in an instant.

"I might have known that you were not. I was blind then, but I am wise now, and because of my wisdom, I know why Mr. Heathcote has come here."

"Mr. Heathcote is a friend of the family."

"Mr. Heathcote loves you, and so do I, and I want to know my fate now. Mildred, will you marry me?"

She had known that it was coming, and yet it was a great shock to her. She could not look at him, as she said tremulously, "I cannot marry you, Mr. Landry."

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“Why not?” he asked simply.
“Do you love some one else?”

“You have no right to ask that question, but I do not mind answering you. No; but I cannot marry you. First, because I do not love you; why, I hardly know you.”

“Then it has meant nothing to you,—our companionship? And it meant so much to me. You speak of hardly knowing me, and yet you have so filled my heart and life that I can hardly think of a time when I did not know and love you.”

“Oh, Landry, please don’t,” she cried piteously. “I did so want to be friends with you.” Her aunt’s letter, and her aunt’s horror burned into her mind like a flame. She stole a glance at his face, and it was tender, but sad, so sad.

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In the moment a great hatred grew up within her for her aunt, and all the conventions of her set and kind. Even if she had loved Landry, society had set a barrier between them. Here was her aunt's cowboy with a vengeance. The humour of the situation struck her, and she burst out laughing. The man looked at her with sorrow and indignation in his eyes. But in a moment he understood, for she was as quickly possessed by a passion of tears.

"Forgive me," he said; "I have hurt you. I won't say any more about it,—now," he added firmly. "Come, let's go back."

She did not answer; she only wept the more, for she felt that all she loved, all she wanted, all that in life was worth having was slipping away from her grasp, but she could not

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check it. There stood King Convention; this was his decree.

She dried her eyes as they went back toward the house, he walking disconsolately by her side.

She turned to him as they reached the porch. "Landry," she said, "you will always be my friend?"

"I shall always be your friend and lover," he said, taking her hand, and then he turned away toward his own apartment.

Mildred hurried to her room and threw herself upon the bed. The blessed tears came again to relieve her; and then she sat up, crying softly, for fear the very walls would hear, "Landry, Landry, you are worth some woman's love, but who are you?"

CHAPTER NINTH

IT was strange that in Landry's grief at Mildred's refusal of him, there was no anger at the girl herself. He remembered her distress and her tears, and felt only deep pity and a more overwhelming love for her.

"She loves no one else, she said, and I believe her," Landry mused when he was alone. "Well, then, why shouldn't she love me? She doesn't know me, that's true. I might be a horse-thief or a pick-pocket for all she knows to the contrary. She's right. She has the right to know more about me, and I was a blundering ass to ask her to

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take me for granted. But can I tell her everything? Can I explain to her?" A hard wrinkle came into the man's brow as he thought, "The secret is not mine wholly. But I have lost faith in humanity on account of it; now shall I lose the love of my life for this same reason? Great God! is there no limit to what I must suffer—loss, ignominy, shame, and now this?"

He clenched his hands, and the great beads broke out on his forehead. Then, as was his wont when he wished to think, he saddled a horse and went galloping away.

The land was full of the brisk, sweet smells of autumn. The plain fell away in a gray, barren line that held up a turquoise dome. The little ground-birds, scarcely discernible against the grass, so like themselves,

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skipped away before his horse's feet. But Landry saw nothing, neither landscape, sky, nor birds. He felt nothing, not even the rush of the wind as he swept across the prairie.

Surrounded by the things which he knew and loved and was wont to observe, he was as utterly alone with his own thoughts as if he had suddenly been lifted out of the life of this earth and placed where there were only himself and his soul. He was doubly isolated, in that his was the isolation both of great grief and deep thought. On his face were all the marks of the struggle that was going on within him. His eyes were cold and bright and his cheeks flushed, though his hands held the reins firmly, and there was not the quiver of a muscle in his face. Like a man turned to iron, he rode and rode.

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Every now and then, unconsciously, he dug his heel into the horse's side, as if, moving swiftly though he was, he could not keep pace with the hard, hot gallop of his thoughts. So he went for an hour, and then, without warning, turned homeward again. The strained look in his eyes was gone, and his whole attitude was one of relaxed force. But there was still on his face the expression of a man who has made a vital decision, and who will carry out his plan to the last extreme. He bent over and stroked the horse's damp neck.

"I will do it," he said. "He shall not take this from me."

With him, when a decision was once made there was no turning back. As soon as he reached his room, he sat down and wrote the following letter:—

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“DEAR MISS MILDRED,—I know now the folly I showed in asking you to marry me, about whom you know absolutely nothing. Five years ago I should have known better, but I have been away from civilisation so long that I have forgotten some of its demands and conventions. I had thought that if two people cared for each other, that was all, and there were no other questions to be asked or answered. I confess that I was wrong, and that my theory would only do for a more primitive state of life than this to which you and I belong. But I do not blame you because I blundered, and so, whether or not it affects the issue, I am going to answer the questions, which, if you cared for me, you must have asked.

“I remember that you once repeated the remark that people only came out here on account of crime, cupidity, or consumption. It seems proper that the world should usually take it for granted that the first of these most commonly drives a man to this life. But it was not so in my case. At least, I am

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not a criminal. The story is a long one, and I should prefer telling it to you to writing it. I should beg your permission to do so, except that when I talk to you I lose my head, and say the things that I do not want to say.

“The secret which I disclose here is not, as you will see, entirely my own, and I need not ask in mercy to all concerned that it go no further than the ear of your father, who also has the right to know.

“In the first place, my name is not Landry, that is, it is not my surname, but my mother’s name, by which I choose to be known out here. My full name is Landry Thayer, and I was born in Philadelphia, twenty-eight years ago. My mother died when I was young, and all my boyish love was given to my elder brother, John, and to my father. My first great grief came with the death of the latter, who had always been a tender and indulgent parent to me.

“I mourned for him sincerely, but the buoyancy of youth soon overcame my sorrow and I turned to my brother, now all that was left

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to me, with the whole wealth of my affection. He loved me in return ; and so it was a great wrench when, finishing my course in the city schools, I went away to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. We were wealthy. My brother managed the estates but I had my ambition. I was determined to be one of the world's workers, and engineering took my fancy. I wanted to build bridges. I wanted to dig tunnels. I am making irrigation ditches now ; but even that is part of my plan. You will laugh at this, won't you ? But it's straight.

“ Well, before I left for school, I noticed that my brother cared for, or seemed to care for, a very beautiful, frivolous girl who was at that time dominating Philadelphia society, and who had a dozen men in her train. I did not like her, and told my brother so. He flew into a fury, called me an impudent young cub, and bade me never speak her name again. On my knees and with tears in my eyes, I begged his forgiveness. I was younger then. He barely forgave me, and with a sore heart

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I went to school. One day I received a card that cut me like a knife, and when I came back he was married.

“I hated her ; with all my heart I hated her. She had taken from me all that I had — my brother. He was cold and stern with me now, where he had always been loving and kind before. Well, I suppose that I was a young fool, and precipitated matters, but I did not exert myself to be agreeable to my sister-in-law. After a while she told my brother that I was a sullen young fellow, and made her very unhappy. The result was another scene, and my brother, who I believe, loved his wife sincerely, forbade me the house, which he, as the elder, had inherited.

“He packed me out, bag and baggage, and I went into lodgings ; but still I did not blame him, and even when I went back to school, I only felt that I was a jealous young fool, who deserved my brother’s anger ; and God knows I was jealous, for his had been the only love outside a father’s that I had ever known. At college there was an allow-

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ance ample for all my wants, for I was not extravagant. All went well, and I grew enthusiastic over my work. It is a great work, after all. I was looking forward with joy to my Christmas vacation, when I could go home and be reconciled to him. It was then the blow fell upon me. I received a letter from him, my brother, my only one, saying: 'Since things are as they are, would it not be better if we do not meet? So I would be glad if you spent your vacations from home.' You do not know how it hurt me. Even now I feel the terrible searing of it. My brother, my own brother turned against me, and asking me not to come to my father's house! I had thought the other disagreement only temporary, but this was final.

"I was proud, and I did not go back, nor did I write to him. Occasionally, in the papers, I saw reports of the magnificence of his entertainments, and I was glad, for I loved and trusted him still, though I hated her.

"Then I heard that he had sailed for Europe. I was glad, because he had always

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wanted to see the wonders of the old world. 'John has gone away,' I told my chum; 'I'm glad, because he always wanted to see the things over there.'

"'It's a pity,' said my chum; 'I'm sorry for his wife.'

"I need not say what I did to Jack Alston; only, since he knows that I did not know then, he has forgiven me and writes to me now, and I love him. He is building a bridge somewhere.

"After Jack had given me this cue, I went and looked further. The papers said that my brother had left suddenly, without his wife, and that there were rumors of irregularities in his handling of my father's estate.

"They were lies, all lies, and I knew it; so I rushed home to refute them. In my father's house, at the door out of which I had seen carried the man who had fathered us both, I met that woman.

"'Oh, it's you,' she said, when the servant had taken her my card. 'It's awful about John, is n't it? Not a thing left.'

"'You're a liar, you're a liar!' I cried,

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‘—and a thief too, and a murderess!’ And I flung out of the hall, and down the steps.

“‘Heavens, the man is mad!’ I heard her say as I was going.

“But the rest is hardly worth the telling. My brother had gone from one excess to another, entertaining, speculating, until he had been tempted to touch what was not his. Then my fortune, — I blessed him for sparing me so long — had gone to make up the deficiency. Then he had left. Out of all my father’s estate, save what that woman had, there were scarcely five thousand dollars left. I could not stand the grief of it. She showed me a letter from him saying that had I not proved ungrateful, — *ungrateful!* — it would have been better. I do not believe he wrote it now.

“With this, and the money that I had left, I came West because I could not bear the sight and sound of the things that had driven my brother to crime. They did drive him. They did drive him, for I knew him when he was square. A year later I heard that he was dead, — had shot himself at Monaco. His widow is married.

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“That is why I hate civilisation, and you are the first one who has ever called me back to it. Do not judge my brother too harshly; he was not so much to blame as the devilish, deceitful, strenuous civilisation that drove him to his death.

“With the little money, I have prospered some. Cripple Creek was kind to me, and this ranch calls me one of its masters. Mildred, darling, you know my story. Forgive me if I have given you more than usual of —

“LANDRY.”

This letter Mildred received next morning from the hand of Tod. She dropped her tears upon it as she read. Then she arose and went to her father.

“Papa,” she said, “Landry has proposed to me, and I —”

“Landry!”

“— and I refused him; here is his letter.”

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The old man got up, the colour in his face rising in anticipation, as it were, of occasion.

“Why—” Then he began to read the letter. As he read, the anger died from his face and the tear-drops fell on his ruddy, wrinkled cheeks. They fell as freely as the girl’s.

“Do you love him?” he asked, when he had finished.

“No,” answered Mildred, firmly; and then, “I don’t think I do.”

“I am almost sorry,” said her father, “for Landry — ah! — Landry is a very big man; but I suppose it’s Heathcote. Well —”

“Heathcote!” snapped Mildred, “I hate Heathcote!” and she swept from the room.

“She hates Heathcote!” said Mr. Osborne. “What a remarkable girl! Yesterday it was Landry.”

CHAPTER TENTH

FOR some reason or other, quite unrelated to love, Mildred had cried herself to sleep over Landry's letter. She thought it was because she pitied him in his sorrow. When they met again she told him so, and he was more miserable than ever, because she gave him pity when he wanted love.

They tried to resume their old relations, but utterly without success. There was always between them a subtle embarrassment, the shadow of his refusal.

So the days went by until the time for the round-up. Landry

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kept his promise to Mildred, and saw that arrangements were made for her to ride out to see the cattle when they were to be driven down into the valley. Heathcote had begged to be allowed to ride with the men, and permission had been granted to him. He was as happy as a boy, although he had sacrificed his own inclination and forced Landry to take back his horse for the work.

It was noon of a Monday when the men set out for the broad valley into which the cattle were to be driven down from the ranges. With Heathcote, there were eleven of them in all, — brawny, raw-boned fellows, bronzed by the sun and wind, hard riders, hard swearers, but faithful to their duty and fearless in the discharge of it. It was near evening

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when they reached their destination. The horses were unharnessed from the grub-wagon as soon as it came up with them, and after supper they camped for the night, resting for the next day's riding.

They were up the following morning, and with three men left at camp, were away into the hills. All day long they rode the ranges, cleaning them out as with a great ever-moving comb, and the cattle streamed down into the valley. It was an all-day undertaking, and not yet done when Mildred came in the evening. The buck-board brought her and her father, and her pony Jack trotted behind. It was a wonderful sight to her, and she was much grieved that Landry insisted upon her and her father's camping so far away from the herd that night. It seemed to make

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of them only spectators, when she wished to be part and parcel of it. But Landry knew, as she did not, the words of the songs the cowboy sings as he gallops by night round and round his cattle.

Stirred with the novelty of the situation, Mildred was up in the morning with the earliest of them. It was a glorious day; all golden-browns, yellows, and blues. The mist hung heavy over the mountains, but for miles along the plain the air was as clear as the water of a mountain stream. It was one of those hot days which come to Colorado even as late as November. It was very still, save for the calling of the men one to another as the drove of cattle, eight hundred strong, went milling round and round the valley. All the night before, the men

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had circled the herd, singing their interminable songs to reassure them. But to-day the animals were nervous. The smell of water in the bottom of a dry wash, which ran across the end of the valley at its entrance, made them restive, and every now and then one would break away and dash forward, only to be followed by one of the boys and driven back to his fellows. They snorted and bellowed and pushed one upon the other. Their horns crashed and waved, a short, bristling, terrible forest, and their brown or brindled sides gleamed in the sun. It was hard work keeping them together.

To the front and left of the churning herd Landry was riding, his face gloomy and sad. Behind him, on the same side, rode Heathcote, while directly opposite, on her favourite

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pony, was Mildred. Near her Landry had placed a cowboy, to see that no ill came to her.

He looked uneasily across at Mildred and then glanced at the nervous steers.

"I wish she hadn't come," he muttered. "It's the day and the place for a nasty stampede." A big steer far to the front bellowed and sniffed the air. Landry rode quickly forward, and the long thong of his quirt curled about the great fellow's neck, and the column moved on as before. It was nearly seven o'clock in the morning, and while some of the men were busy keeping the cattle from breaking away, others were preparing to cut out the beef steers for shipping and the late calves for branding.

A wind sprang up, and it seemed

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that the heat of the atmosphere was about to abate. Landry breathed freer, and again his glance wandered over to the girl he loved. He caught her eye and she smiled at him. He felt as if she had laid a cooling hand upon his brow.

Mildred was a spectacle to call forth the admiration of a man who loved her even less than did Landry. Her gray habit fitted snugly her girlish form, and a soft felt hat with an eagle feather on the side, sat jauntily on her brown head. She was joyous with the movement and life about her, and glad with a feeling of sufficiency which came to her as she turned her pony this way and that.

Her father had felt some misgivings about her coming, but she had pleaded so hard, and had looked so beautiful as she begged, that he had

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kissed her and told her to go, while he remained with the grub-wagon not far away. He knew that with two such protectors as Landry and Heathcote she could hardly come to harm.

She was going gaily along, and the glow on her face made Landry's heart leap. Then, in a second, it all happened. A bunch of steers broke away toward the water. One by one of the ringing multitude joined them, until in a few minutes the whole herd had joined in the wild rush toward the box-cañon.

"Stampeded!" was the one word that Mildred's cowboy protector expelled from his lips as he galloped away from her side. The cattle were racing like mad down the valley, making a seething caldron of bubbling backs.

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The girl saw what had happened. Her face went white. But a sudden thought took her, and digging her heel into the pony's side, with set face she went flying after the maddened steers, bending steadily to the right. She had heard that in such a case the thing to do was first to try and turn them, and then to get the cattle milling, and she felt that she herself might help to do it. But the cattle-men, all forgetful of her, had swept round to the left of the herd and were trying to turn them to the right; for they knew just how far back lay the deep dry run, and what it meant if their raging charges reached that. They had seen such sights before; when the cattle, which made their life and the existence of the ranch possible, went headlong into the steep cut and piled one

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upon the other, a groaning, bellowing, quivering mass of struggling flesh. They had seen the cut filled until the rear guard of the herd had passed over on a bridge of their dead fellows. So it was no wonder that they forgot the girl, and went galloping wildly to the left of the throng. Even Heathcote became infected with the insanity of the men around him, and the terrible whirl of the whole scene. He put whip and spur to his horse and swept on with them. On, on they went, to the left, bearing the enraged steers to the right, turning them ever from the ditch of death. But Mildred, unconscious of what they were doing, only knowing and feeling the thought that dominated her own soul, raced up behind the herd, still bearing to the right, and on to her death. Let the steers

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but turn and they would sweep over her, and she would be as utterly lost as a scrap of paper in the mad breath of the cyclone. Only one gray-faced man took in the situation. Landry had started with the men, but two hundred yards down the valley he saw her, and for the time that the glance took him, his heart stood still. "My God!" he cried, "what is the girl doing?" And then, without further time for thought, he cut straight across to the right, behind the herd, and went racing after her. It was only a matter of time, a trial of speed between him and the pony she rode, a race between Love and Death. Down the valley the girl rode, and he after her. The distance between them was wide, for he had to cross the whole width of the herd, but he felt himself gaining at every

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leap of the roan mare's brawny legs. Then did he thank God that Heathcote had given him back his own good mount. No other horse could have done it, could have overtaken the lithe little pony galloping so madly ahead. "Great God!" he said, "will they yet have time to turn before I reach her?" and he called to his horse with a prayer that was half an oath. The brown prairie burned under the roan's feet. Mildred did not look back. She rode as one rides who has a purpose, and that purpose quickly to be accomplished. They were nearing the cut now. He could see a straggly tree or two which grew upon its sides. "Mildred, Mildred!" he cried out, but the wind blew his voice behind him and laughed in his face. Then Landry swore deeply, and the next moment

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uttered a prayer to Heaven, and struck his horse until the spurs drew blood from her foaming sides. On, on, they pressed the cattle on the left. The roan flew, and Landry was gasping and his breath came hard between shut teeth. His eyes were wild as he came nearer, nearer. They were turning now, and there were a hundred yards between them. He swept up and stretched out his hand for the pony's bridle; but just then the deep hole of a prairie dog reached out and caught the pony's off forefoot. He stumbled. Mildred swayed in her saddle. Landry's hand forgot the goal to which it had started as he rode up to her side. He threw his arm around her waist and dragged her willy-nilly from her saddle, throwing her rudely, but safe, across the pommel of his own. Then his knees

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pressed the sides of the roan mare, and she, obedient, turned sharply to the right. They were just in time. Mildred's pony floundered and attempted to rise. Just then the herd swerved suddenly further to the right, and in a moment the little beast who had so lately borne the girl was beaten beneath a hundred hoofs.

With tears of excitement in his eyes, and curses of pure joy that took the place of prayers and thanksgivings on his lips, Landry slowed his horse and rode back toward the grub-wagon. He looked down into Mildred's face. It was white as death itself could have painted it; she had fainted. He bent above her, and a groan forced itself from the depths of his very soul. "I have hurt her," he cried, "but she will live, she will live, thank God!"

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He rode as swiftly as he could back to the wagon where her father was waiting. Mr. Osborne saw them coming, Mildred lying as one dead across the saddle. He rose, pale and trembling, as Landry drew up. "What have you done to my child?" he said in a voice so low that it was scarcely audible.

"I have brought her back to you," said Landry; "she is hurt a little, but she is safe. Take her;" and putting the girl into her father's arms, he turned his horse and went swiftly back to his duty.

With the help of the drivers the grub-wagon was cleared, and Mildred was laid on a bed made of the men's coats. Nina was wringing her hands in the excess of helpless grief, but Hendrickson, who had seen it all, rode up, knowing and helpful. Her

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shoulder was wrenched. It was not a great affair, and he set himself at once to put it in place and to bandage it.

"It is not so much," he said to Mr. Osborne; "she is greatly shaken up, but she is young and will soon be well."

But the old man only bent above his daughter, crying, "Oh, Mildred! Mildred! have I brought you out here for this?"

On the girl's face there was no sign of life, but the set expression still lay about her lips. "Will she live?" asked Mr. Osborne.

"Oh, yes," said Hendrickson, "she will live; she is not greatly hurt. It will be a little painful, but she will live."

"If she recovers from this I shall take her home at once," her father

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said, his anger at himself growing that he had allowed her to run into such great danger.

"She is a brave young woman," said Hendrickson. "I am glad that Landry saw her in time."

"Landry! Landry! he has saved my daughter to me. I wonder what I can do to reward him."

The big ranch-manager smiled. "I think your daughter will know better than you," he said.

Osborne looked at him dully, as if hardly comprehending. "He is a big fellow," he said; "I have always told her so."

Mildred's eyelids fluttered with returning consciousness.

CHAPTER ELEVENTH

WHEN Mildred regained consciousness she found herself lying in the grub-wagon, with Nina beside her. The wagon had been substituted for the buck-board, as being easier for her to recline in.

"What has happened, Nina?" she asked. "I remember about the stampede, and — and — Mr. Landry; but was I hurt, was I injured in any way?"

"Not unto death, miss," said Nina, solemnly; "but Mr. Hendrickson, he says your shoulder's out o' place, an' while you was insensible he set it, an' he says you'll soon be all right. But the pony, oh, miss, you should see the pony!"

"It was killed?"

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“ Ah, Miss Mildred, killed was no name for it. It was pulverized.”

“ What are they going to do with me now? ” asked the girl, a shudder passing over her frame at the thought of the poor animal.

“ They ’re going to start to the ranch-house with you as soon as you dare move.”

“ Tell them, Nina, that I want to see the spot; don’t say pony, whatever you do, — the spot where it occurred.”

Nina went upon her errand and Mildred settled back with tears of pain and humiliation in her eyes.

“ I wanted to do something big because I felt strong and capable; and I knew he looked at me with contempt; and, oh! how it has turned out! It only leaves me his debtor — his debtor,” and with repetition the

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thought did not seem so bitter. "Well, he did his part; he was very brave and noble. Even if I cannot love him, I can respect him."

Then her father put his anxious face in at the door. "So you've come around all right, my dear? Hendrickson said you would. Really, he's quite a surgeon. Are you in much pain?"

"My shoulder does hurt very much, papa, but that doesn't matter. I'm sorry I gave you so much anxiety."

"Don't say a word, my child; I shall have you taken back at once to the ranch-house. But Nina tells me that you want to see the spot where the accident occurred. I don't believe I would if I were you, my dear."

"I want to see it, papa, and if they cannot take me I shall walk."

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"There, there, don't excite yourself, my child; you shall see it. We will go by it on our way home."

He signalled to the men, and one galloped ahead, while the other started the horses which had been harnessed to the wagon, to await any turn which Mildred's injury might take.

As Nina sat down beside her mistress, Mildred's face flushed and paled by turns, and she looked into the maid's eyes wistfully.

"What is it, Miss Mildred?" asked Nina, gently.

"Nothing," snapped Mildred, going all red again; "did I ask for anything?"

"No, miss, but I thought you looked like you wanted something."

"No," she replied more gently, "but my shoulder does hurt so."

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"You poor, dear child!" said Nina, easing the wounded part.

"I hope," Mildred went on, "that poor Mr. Landry is n't suffering this way."

Deceitful is the human heart, but it's the eye that usually gives it away; and so Nina saw nothing, for at that moment her mistress' eyes were closed in a spasm of pain.

"La, miss!" she exclaimed, "him a-sufferin'? Why, he was n't hurt at all!"

The eyes suddenly flew open, almost too suddenly for honesty, and the sufferer cried eagerly, "Was n't he? oh, I'm so glad!" And then a tell-tale look came into her eyes, and they were closed again in pain.

When the wagon had stopped at the spot to which Mildred indicated she wished to go, she raised the flap

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with her uninjured hand and looked out of the opening. There was nothing there, except the marks of many hoofs and a space covered with grass and sage.

She knew at once what it was.

"Uncover it," she said.

"No, no, Mildred," protested her father. He had sent the man on for that purpose, knowing what the sight would be.

"I want to see him," she persisted.

"But miss," said the man who had ridden on ahead, "it ain't a pleasant sight for a young lady."

"That's why I want to see it."

"Mildred! "

"Papa, must I get out and do it myself? "

Mr. Osborne nodded to the men, and they began to uncover the flat, soft something that had once been

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the pony. The hoofs of eight hundred cattle had beaten its flesh almost into the soil. Mildred gazed at it. "And I should have been like that," she said. "Thank you. Come, papa;" and she lay down again, very white. "Poor pony! poor little Jack! I rode him to his death, but I hope his spirit will forgive me, for I didn't mean to. I wonder if horses have souls or spirits?" she asked Nina a bit later.

And Nina answered, "I'm sure I don't know, miss, never havin' studied such things."

As soon as they were back at the ranch-house, where much ado was made both of Mildred and of the event of the morning, Mr. Osborne came into his daughter's room to see if she needed anything beyond Nina's ministrations.

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"Papa," she asked, "Mr. Landry was very brave to-day, wasn't he?"

"Not only brave, but decisive, my dear; a moment's delay would have lost you to me forever. That man has the making of a general in him."

"Do you think so?"

"Mildred, my child, you speak of it so apathetically. The man saved your life, and I want you to thank him with all your heart."

"I was just going to suggest something of the kind. Send him to me as soon as he comes. Remember, papa, as soon as he comes."

"Yes, my dear."

"And now I'm going to try to sleep."

She closed her eyes until her father had left the room, then she opened them very wide, and lay gazing into space.

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“Poor Jack!” she sighed, “and poor Landry! One I killed and the other I wounded. Well, I shall see him to-morrow.”

But it was three days before Landry saw her; for when the message came, he was still away with the cattle, and the captain of the round-up could not, or would not, spare him.

When he arrived and came into her room she was sitting at her window, and rose to greet him. One arm was in a sling, but she extended the well hand to him.

“It was good of you to come,” she said, and she felt just how flat and commonplace the words must sound.

“I could not do otherwise,” said Landry, a little stiffly; although, after he had dropped her hand his own

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had gripped convulsively as he looked upon her pain.

“I — I — went up to see the pony. Oh!” She put her hand over her face as if to shut out the sight.

Landry flushed angrily.

“Who was fool enough to take you up there?” he said.

“I made them,” she answered.

“I would rather you had n’t seen it. It was n’t a pretty sight.”

“But it was an instructive one. It told me what I would have been like had you let my folly take its course.”

“I don’t know about that. I guess you were all right.”

“It told me, too, what you had done for me.”

“That was nothing; any fellow that knew anything about horses and cattle — ”

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She waved him into silence, and he stood abashed, holding his hat like a scolded schoolboy.

“I know, I know,” she said; “but what I want you to understand is that it was not all wantonness on my part, my galloping after them as I did. No, hear me out, for you cannot, do not understand. After I saw that they had stampeded, I suddenly remembered what you had once told me of the method to be pursued, and I was possessed with the idea of helping to do it, so I raced after them in hopes that I could turn them, or start them — what do you call it? — grinding or ringing.

A shade of a smile came into the man’s eyes, but his lip quivered with a deeper emotion, and the impulse was very strong upon him to take the poor little wounded girl into his

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arms and strain her to his breast. But he remembered Thursday, and held himself back.

"Your ambition was very noble, Miss Mildred," he said; and it sounded very mean to him after it was out, though, "God knows," he told himself, "I did not intend it so."

"It was very foolish and reckless," Mildred went on; "but then, I did so want to see a round-up, and when I saw those cattle making for the dry wash I knew what it meant, and I wanted to help. Of course, I didn't know how, and I made a silly spectacle of myself; but I did want to do something worthy, and — and — I only made you risk your life."

"That was nothing. You were perfectly right, Miss Mildred, and no one blames you in the least. It was such an accident as might happen

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anywhere. There are no serious consequences attached to it, save the pain you suffer, but that will pass, and thank God you were n't killed." Landry blurted it out before he could check himself, but in a moment he saw his mistake, and went on calmly, "Your father would never have forgiven us if you had been trampled out there."

"Landry, I know I owe my life to you. How can I thank you? What can I do to pay the debt?"

The young man threw up his head, and there was a light in his eyes that she had never seen there before. Then, with a bow that was his heritage from some old Virginia grandfather, he replied, "Consider the debt cancelled, Miss Mildred," and turning hastily on his heel, left the room.

"He is angry with me," Mildred

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murmured. "I did everything but scorn him ; " and she sat down crying softly, but bitterly.

She was filled with both sorrow and anger. She would not admit to herself that she loved Landry, and had done wrong to refuse him. She attributed all her misery to her inability to show him her gratitude. Had the young rancher returned even then and renewed his question, it is doubtful that she would have told him yes. Unconsciously, perhaps, but nevertheless dangerously, she was playing with her own feelings and his.

Her mood of grief was succeeded by one of distinct pettishness. "I am sure," she thought, "I can't go on my knees to him to thank him for what he has done. I do appreciate it, and I have tried to tell him

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so. What does he expect? Oh, well, I do hope papa will satisfy him, and express all that I cannot."

She knew perfectly that her father couldn't and wouldn't, but it pleased her to be perverse, even to try to deceive herself.

Some one knocked at the door, and Nina came in. "Please, Miss Mildred," she said, "Mr. Heathcote gave me these for you." "These" was a bunch of brilliant red and white roses.

"Put them on the table, Nina."

"Yes, miss; can I do anything for you?"

"No, go."

Evidently, "miss" was cross, and Nina went.

"I suppose he sent all the way to Denver for these," she said, handling the flowers. "I wish he

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would n't. Now if —" she blushed furiously, all alone as she was, and threw the offending flowers into one corner of the room, where they lay, the white and the red, like a pale girl bleeding. She sat down and brooded awhile, and then, relenting, picked up the flowers and replaced them in a vase.

Woman is a strange creature, and there is no accounting for her moods, and this is hereby acknowledged, or else one would be helpless before this one. For suddenly Mildred burst out laughing, and flying to the couch, hid her head in a pillow, rising at last to exclaim, "Well, I don't care if I do," and to sit looking with dreamy eyes into the fire, and a smile on her lips.

Meanwhile, Landry, in passing out, had encountered Mr. Osborne, who was in wait for him.

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"My dear Landry," exclaimed the old man, holding out both his hands, "how can I ever thank you for the great thing you have done for me? Words are so poor."

"Don't mention it," said Landry; "it was nothing."

"Perhaps you may regard it as nothing, but it was everything to me." There was deep pathos in Mr. Osborne's voice and great earnestness, and Landry, looking at him, said bitterly in his soul, "Perhaps I do regard it too lightly;" but aloud he said, "I am glad to have been able to serve you, Mr. Osborne."

"I hope my daughter has thanked you."

"Oh, she has thanked me," was the grim reply.

"I fear she has hardly said all that she wishes to say or that she feels.

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She is like me there, my dear boy; I can't say what I feel. Just take it for granted; and if ever I can do you a service, no matter how great, just call on me. I am your servant."

"Don't mention it," said Landry, hastily, and he bolted.

"That is a very remarkable young man," said Mr. Osborne, gently. "I fear Mildred has not fully expressed her gratitude to him. I must see;" so he went to Mildred.

He found her still musing before the fire, with the smile on her face and a wrinkle between her brows. When he told her his beliefs and fears, she put her arm around his neck and drew him down to her.

"You're a dear old papa," she said; and that was all the answer he ever got.

And Landry went off to be miserable by himself.

CHAPTER TWELFTH

IT was not exactly anger that had driven Landry from Mildred's presence with high head and flashing eyes. He felt that resentment against fate which a man feels when his sorrows are not the fault of any particular person. He had left the presence of the woman he loved, less because her inadequate thanks provoked him than from the fear that the words which were tugging at his heart would strain up and burst from his lips.

"All that's over now," he told himself bitterly. "I can't go to her now, like the hero of a dime novel, and ask her hand in return for her life. It would be cowardly, and it would

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be mean." So he went moping miserably about, all his enthusiasm in life dead or dormant.

He consistently avoided Mr. Osborne and Mildred, much to the former's surprise and the latter's grief. Mr. Osborne knew Landry so little as to think now that he had so great a claim that he would renew his suit, and successfully, for he believed that Mildred's gratitude must ripen into love for her saviour.

Mildred frankly hoped that he would speak again, but knowing him better, she expected it less. It was strange now that repression intensified her feelings. She saw her lover but little, but she thought of him only the more. The vision of him was ever before her, and she remembered, with a pleasure so keen that it was almost pain, the innumerable little

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acts of kindness and consideration that had unconsciously endeared him to her. She missed their long rides together, and all the details of their sweet companionship. Fearing that before she had held him too cheaply, she now placed an unwarrantably high value upon him.

So the days went on, and still Landry did not come to her, when one day, her father approached her with a letter in his hand. His face was very grave, and his voice shook as he said, —

“Mildred, I have just received a letter from your aunt.”

The girl looked up apprehensively.

“Your aunt writes me that she fears that I have not kept a father’s eye upon you, and that you are being allowed to be too much in the company of a very low person — in fact,

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as your aunt puts it, a horrible cowboy."

Mildred was looking angrily at her father now, but her anger was not for him.

"Pray," went on the old man, "whom does she mean?"

"She means the cowboy who saved my life a little while ago."

"She — she — cannot mean Landry?"

"She does, and she has written me before about it."

"Hum," said Mr. Osborne, gently, but with an annoyed look. "Your aunt is a very remarkable person. I shall write to her; I shall tell her," his voice was rising, "that Landry Thayer is a gentleman, and my friend, and the equal of any man I ever knew."

"Oh, papa," and Mildred's head

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was hidden on her father's waistcoat, somewhere in the region of the heart.

He held her off, and looked at her blushing face.

"Is it so?" he asked.

"Yes, and has been for a long time, but I did n't know."

He took his daughter very gently in his arms, and kissed her, saying, "I am very glad."

Meanwhile Landry, knowing nothing of the happiness in store for him, and hoping nothing, had determined to go further into the mountains for a shoot with Heathcote. That amiable young Englishman still lingered, and rode, drove, and shot with the joy that only a true sportsman can know. The friendship between him and Landry had increased, and when the latter was not mooning about, they were always together.

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Mildred had been seeing almost as little of the one as she had of the other. It was Heathcote's plan to give her a respite from his importunities, and maybe, he thought, she would come round to his way of thinking. He had decided now, on his return from his hunting trip to go directly East; so the day before the start was to be made, he came to her once more.

She saw his purpose in his eyes, and would have saved him this final humiliation, but he would speak.

"I hope I'm not boring you too much," he said humbly, "but I have kept silent as long as I can, and on my return, I shall go directly East, so I thought maybe you would n't mind giving me my answer now."

She looked at him with shining eyes, and he took a moment's hope,

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which was destined to be dashed immediately.

"Arthur, my good friend," she said, "I will not keep you in suspense. I cannot say to you what I said a little while ago, for now I do love another. I thank you for the honour you do me, for it is an honour to be loved by such a man."

He bowed and she gave him her hand. He was turning away, when suddenly a light broke through the gloom of his face, and he came back to her eagerly.

"I say," he began awkwardly, "It could n't be old Landry, you know?"

"It is Landry," she said firmly.

"That's good, that's good," he said, with a ring of honesty in his voice; "I'd rather him than anybody else except myself. I congratulate you both." He stood pumping her

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hand, and smiling down at her, though there lurked a sadness in his eyes.

“There — there — is nothing to congratulate me about. Landry asked me before the stampede, and then I did not know, so I refused him. He has not asked me since.”

Heathcote gazed at her for a moment in silence, and then he turned abruptly and left the room.

“What are you going to do?” she cried.

But he did not answer, and she sat down, suddenly laughing and crying, both together.

There was no mistaking Heathcote’s purpose, and Mildred was filled with a great gladness, while her heart quivered with fright. Landry would know, he would know that she loved

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him, and would come to her. Had she been unmaidenly to take this method to let him know?

Meanwhile Heathcote was striding along at a great gait. He burst into the door of the room where Landry sat cleaning a gun.

"You blooming ass," cried Heathcote, snatching the rifle from his friend's hands, "You blooming, idiotic ass."

"All right," said Landry, "What's the matter? You're getting your hands full of oil."

"Why don't you go to her?" said Heathcote.

Landry suddenly stood up, his nostrils dilated with excitement.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"She loves you," blurted the other "I've just asked for her hand; it's about the seventh time, I think.

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She'll never marry me, old chap; you're the man."

"How do you know?"

Landry was trembling like a leaf.

"Never mind how I know, I'm not telling secrets," Heathcote had shown remarkable reticence, it must be admitted. "You go to her, and thank your God it's you."

"I can't do it, old man," said the ranchman, sadly taking his seat.

"Can't do it? Why, what the — Why, man, you've got to do it."

"I can't, I can't! And how I wish I could!"

Heathcote stared at him with wide, uncomprehending eyes.

"Well, I'll be — Look here; will you tell me why?"

"Don't you see, Heathcote, that she has made it impossible for me to marry her, or even to ask her. Why,

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damu it, man, if I should take her now, it would look as if I had bought that sweet girl's life by an act of cheap heroism. Can't you see that?"

In his excitement, Landry sprang up, and seized his friend's arm.

"If any one else spoke of your act in that tone and that manner," said Heathcote, slowly, "I should knock him down. You did a great thing; a big thing, and you saved a woman's life. Besides, she loves you. Go to her."

"I have told you why I cannot go."

Heathcote put his hands upon his friend's shoulders, and looked him squarely in his eyes.

"You're a damned fool," he said, "and all kinds of an idiot in the bargain, but you're the biggest man I've ever met. You may call me a meddler, or what you please, but I'm

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not going to let you suffer and make a woman suffer, simply because God did not choose to give you a fair amount of honest British vanity;" and he was out of the room in an instant.

It was with strangely confused feelings that Mildred saw the Englishman coming back to her. What was the matter? Why did not Landry come to her? Was his pride, after all, stronger than his love for her? Her face burned with shame at the memory of the means she had taken to bring him back, and the longing she had to hear his words of love again. Heathcote did not make matters better as he reached her. He may have always been honest, but it is true that he was seldom tactful.

"He won't come," he blurted out.

"Who sent for him?" said Mildred,

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rising proudly. "I am sorry, Mr. Heathcote, that you so little respected the confidence I gave you." Her anger was rising, her face was blazing. "An American gentleman," she went on, hotly, "in a like circumstance, would have known how to hold his tongue."

"Oh, come, now," said Heathcote, shamefacedly, "I could n't help it, you know. Landry's awfully cut up because he could n't come, but he's got some bally idea about your liking him out of gratitude, and his buying you by cheap heroism. It's all silly rot, you know. But say," he paused in admiration, "that fellow's fine."

The anger had left Mildred's face.

"Does he feel all you say?" she asked.

"All that, and more."

She came down the steps, and put her hand on Heathcote's arm.

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"Take me to him," she said, simply.

"Now, that's something like," he said, beaming on her, as if he were not sealing his own death-warrant.

He took her to Landry's door, and left her.

Landry sat alone with his head in his hands. He looked up at her step. Then he sprang to his feet with a glad cry, and rushed toward her. She took a step toward him, and only smiled with a great content as he folded her in his arms. Beyond the one glad cry that had seemed to burst like a flame from the lava crust of his heart, he had said no word, and Mildred, looking up, saw that he was sobbing silently, as only a strong, reticent man can sob, when he does give way.

"Poor Landry," she said, stroking his head, "it's all right now, and we won't misunderstand any more."

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Later, they went to Mr. Osborne, hand in hand. But they had no need to ask his consent. He was as happy in their love as they themselves.

When Mrs. Annesley was written to, it is reported on good authority that she fainted at the first lines of the letter, and could only be brought to with much trouble, so that she could finish it. When she found that Landry Thayer was something besides a cowboy, she consented to let the maid cease fanning her. When she found out that Heathcote was to be best man, she quite recovered, and said, bridling, "Well, that will lend distinction to the affair, and, well — it's very original, anyway."

